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THE WORKS

OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

LIMITED EDITION

III.

FROMONT AND RISLER

ROBERT HELMONT

VOL. I.

Of the LIMITED EDITION of Alphonse Daudet one thousand copies have been printed for America.

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THE WORKS OF
ALPHONSE DAUDET

FROMONT AND RISLER

("*Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*")

TO WHICH IS ADDED

ROBERT HELMONT

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I.

ILLUSTRATED BY L. KOWALSKY

BOSTON
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

ALPHONSE DAUDET, whose death has made so wide a gap in the literary ranks of France, deserves to be better known in the United States than any novelist can be whose works have lacked a good translator. Like Émil Zola he never obtained the honor of a chair in the Academy, and after the appearance of "L'Immortel," which makes cruel sport of an Academician, it was plain that Daudet meant what he said when he protested that he did not care for the honor. Zola not only has cared, but with the peculiar obstinacy — one may say, peculiar narrowness — of his nature has descended again and again to a noisy candidacy, being determined that he shall have recognition, whether his fellows in the Academy desire him or not. Daudet never would have been guilty of such want of tact and taste, however he might have wished for the honor, however he might have been persuaded that the honor was his due.

Daudet is the most prominent descendant in literature of Honoré de Balzac, for although in a certain sense even such eccentrics as Flaubert

and Guy de Maupassant were in the line of descent, they were not so directly the spiritual offspring of the great novelist. And if Thackeray and other British novelists show obligations to Balzac, it is a fact that Daudet is not without traces of British influence, more particularly of the influence of Dickens. Whether this was through the reading of Dickens in translation or in English cannot now be known. The traces, however, are too distinct to be ignored or denied, if it should seem worth the while of a biographer of Daudet to deny it.

Daudet has justified any such appropriation of foreign ideas by the sovereign fact that he has improved upon the original. To take an example: if in the character of the little artist in feathers, Désirée Delobelle, we see hints of one or more girl figures in Dickens, we must concede that Daudet has invested Désirée with far greater charm than Dickens ever gave his own. Daudet struck a high clear note of pathos in the uncomplaining love of Désirée for Frantz Risler; the lame girl is at once more pathetic as a figure and more human as a character than the English prototypes.

As an artist in literature Daudet was greater than Dickens. His literary form, though it is not at all the finest form known to French literature, is yet much finer than that of Dickens, his choice of language more perfect, his descriptions sharper cut and more vivid.

This interplay of French and British literature is no new thing. We know how profound an im-

pression Edgar Allen Poe made in France. Fenimore Cooper has had his disciples in France as well as Germany.

The charm of Daudet lies to a large extent in his style, yet he is not a stylist, not even to the extent that Pierre Loti and Anatole France are stylists. It may be found in his realism, which is the mark of the day; but he is not a realist in Zola's sense. It scarcely lies in his choice of certain subjects which British and American readers prefer to see in any other tongue than English, because *le drame passionel*, much as it has been introduced into his books by Daudet, is not really the essence of them.

I think it is an elusive thing, this charm, just as in the man himself one could not say exactly what it was that made him a charming man. Was it sprightliness? Was it tact? Was it a beaming cordiality that seemed, and probably was, genuine? Was it the impression he gave that he possessed a generous nature raised above the ignoble passions of envy and jealousy?

It has always seemed to me that Daudet differed from most Frenchmen (shall I say, most continental Europeans?) by the presence in his composition of humor in the British and American sense of the word. He may not have been a humorist of the first rank, but surely his Tartarin series display a very remarkable strength in that direction. Even in so desperately gloomy a book as "Sapho" the well-fed, gluttonous couple are

drawn with great humor, while in "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" the two do-nothings, Delobelle and Chèbe, remain in one's memory like some of the deliciously funny creations of Dickens. We who have strolled about Paris for any length of time know them by sight; we have seen them industriously reading a "yellow journal" on the benches in the Luxembourg Gardens and watched their portentous labor over a "bock" in front of one of those ghastly cafés on the Boulevard des Italiens, beloved, alas, of foreigners as well as Parisians. They are not so intentionally humorous as Tartarin, but it may be that artistically they are his peers.

His humor, then, may well cause Daudet's novels to find favor in the eyes of American readers and make them forgive the frequency with which he finds it necessary to introduce unlawful love as the mainspring of his figures. I have a feeling that Daudet himself used this theme with some repugnance, but found it, or thought he found it, absolutely necessary for retaining the favor of the public. This I say without intent to offer an apology for Daudet; he needs no apologist; his work is there for people to read or not as they choose.

Paris itself furnishes a great public for the French novelist; Russia and the United States come next; then Germany, England, Italy, and Spain. For our part the French novel seems to be due in good measure to our encouragement of it. Not American men alone, American women read the

frightful novels poured forth by the Paris press, beside which the worst by Alphonse Daudet is a Sunday-school book. Paris is still the centre of the intellectual world; that craving for stories of wickedness which has always existed in human beings is catered to at Paris; the consumption is more by the foreigner than the Frenchman. Among the literary *articles de Paris* for the foreigners there and for export, the novels of Daudet are redeemed by their artistic power.

In writing prose Daudet had a rhythm all his own, a crisp yet flowing measure; he was an artist in words and he looked his part.

If your preconception of the outward appearance of a literary man includes a mass of dark hair, a pale, finely-chiselled face and large eyes of a charming blackness, Alphonse Daudet was not the man to disappoint you. He looked every inch the literary person. But if your idea comprised a man morose in character, a fidgety, crotchety nature, or one who posed and imposed himself on others, there was nothing in the reality to warrant your expectation.

But when I say not a crotchety nature, I must qualify the remark to this extent: he was not without crotchets; but they were amiable ones, which can be easily explained by his imaginative composition.

It was his habit, for example, to complain of his health in a somewhat fantastic but never a borous way. His favorite bogey was a nerve disease that

corroded the nerve centres and produced general unhappiness at the nerve extremities. And this bogey was the offspring of what? The hot sun of Provence, the *soleil méridional!* When he bent his dark locks forward and flashed his black eyes mysteriously upon you, whilst he held forth concerning the nefarious results of the *soleil méridional*, you felt that there must be, down there in southern France, an evil genius of the sunshine going about to wreck men's nerves, if not destroy men's lives!

Did you ever notice how often Daudet writes in an unkindly way concerning the climate of Paris? If Daudet found the actual skies of Paris black and forbidding, no less did he give us to understand that the moral tone is horrible. In "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" he paints his pictures with a brush less completely filled with black than in some other cases, — such as "Sapho" for instance; but Sapho is the story of a model and woman beyond the pale, while "Fromont Jeune" is laid in quite a different sphere, that of the small bourgeois and manufacturing set, in which, if anywhere, one might expect to meet a certain standard of decency of conduct.

It is the story of a good, kindly man, born outside of France, who likes to labor for others and is doomed by egotists and parasites.

Observe that the two strong good men, Risler Aîné and Sigismond Planus, are both Swiss. Delobelle and Chèbe, two marvellously true figures of

Parisians, the one a man who is always just about to obtain an engagement on the stage, the other a man who is always just about to make a financial ten-stroke, are French of the French; but they live on the hard labor of their wives and children. They are Mantalini and Micawber. Observe, too, that the old purse-proud peasant, Grandfather Gardinois, is a brutal, sinister character; he too is a Frenchman. Fromont Jeune, sensual, pleasure-loving Parisian, faithless to his wife and partner, is in particular the foil of the solid, honest, hard-working, inventive Swiss. Daudet is more pitiless toward the Parisians than toward the Provençals, whom he laughs at, but does not really hate.

It is interesting to couple this view of Paris and its people with Daudet's attacks on Paris skies and weather; but there is more behind. Daudet, being from Provence, was a foreigner in Northern France and saw the people with the cold, unsympathetic eyes of a foreigner. He belonged to the people who, at the outbreak of the Franco-German war, held back; and when they did move, moved with reluctance. Consciously or unconsciously, and I may claim the advantage of a brief acquaintance with him to say that, in my opinion, it was unconscious, Daudet remained throughout his life what he was when he first journeyed to Paris as a young man — at heart a stranger.

Not that as an artist he failed to see the beauty of Paris; many passages in this and more passages in other works testify how delicate was his mental

reaction to the manifold charms of the city, how he enjoyed Paris like a virtuoso who stands in ecstasy before a piece of bric-à-brac. But whilst he was a merciless critic he was not even so much of a patriot as the Hebrew prophet, calling down the vengeance of the Lord upon a people for their own good. One feels that Daudet did not like the Parisians. He does not curse them, it is true; he is no moralizer. He did not care enough for them to curse them. But his heart was in Provence, or Switzerland, or even England rather than France. One sometimes has a suspicion that it irked him to have always to describe Parisians, and that irksomeness was translated into words yet bitterer than before.

We have here a possible reason, one more reason, let us say, which might work all the more effectually for being unavowed, why Daudet was rejected of the Academy. Zola is unpopular in France not merely because he has espoused the cause of a Jew at a time when a wave of anti-Semitism has risen; he is unpopular because his books present a frightful picture of all ranks in France, all classes — the army and peasantry, the small bourgeoisie in country towns and the rabble of Paris. Zola is even more pitiless, even more foreign than Daudet. In his "Book of Snobs" the great English humorist scored each and every rank of British society, but he did it like a Briton. Zola and Daudet seem to reflect a spirit of deliberate hostility, as of critics who wish their country

ill. I say seem, because I believe that Zola, and am positive that Daudet, was as completely patriotic as any of the senseless ones who bellowed round Zola's heels during the famous trials.

In his conversation, too, Daudet often showed his turn for humor. Prompt and vivid of speech, he was quick to detect any peculiarity in the person with whom he conversed, and ever ready to seize the comic side of a topic. Imaginative, like the *méridional* whom he depicted in Numa Roumestan, in Tartarin and his companions, his books rarely flag in interest; one reads them from cover to cover for the incidents they present rather than for the pleasure of their literary style. They satirize the boasts and mouthings and indolence and senseless lies of the Southern French.

It is when one passes the works of Daudet in review, from the Tartarins to "La Belle Nivernoise," from "Jack" to "L'Evangéliste," that one begins to realize the uncommon range of the man as a literary producer. His charm of style seems to have permitted him to write the most innocent, sweet, smiling stories and yet introduce into some of his novels situations that one would hate to characterize, but such as would be violently assailed in another writer.

"Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" introduces one to the life of the working people of Paris. The factory for printed papers is run on old-fashioned lines; workmen and workwomen are of the old style; most primitive of all are Risler and the

bookkeeper Sigismond. To American business men there is something inadequate, if picturesque, not only in the factory, but the business methods of the firm. Until the balance is struck on the 31st of January nobody knows whether the firm is soluble or bankrupt. Risler's ignorance of what is going on, to the detriment of the firm, would seem rather incredible even in a man absorbed in the development of an invention; but Risler is not a modern business man and Fromont is merely the son, with a faculty for dissipation, who owes his place to his father.

Is there a heroine in this novel? There is a star performer, the wicked genius in the shape of Sidonie, but she is scarcely more the heroine than the patient wife whose happiness she undermines. The hero is Risler, the foreigner whose steady qualities, truthfulness, industry and will power are contrasted with the lying, shallow natures of his partner and wife and friends. In that respect and to that degree was Daudet a moralist in "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné." How close an observer he is may be found in the fact that the story of Désirée was repeated the other day in New York in the fate of a young dressmaker, crippled by illness, who committed suicide because of the double unhappiness of dependency on her mother and unrequited love.

"Robert Helmont" offers as great a contrast to "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" as one may wish to see. It was far from being a success when it

appeared in 1872, and the reason for its lack of popularity is not far to seek. As a literary study it might fairly be placed among Daudet's masterpieces; but on the one hand it is short, on the other the fine quality of the book is lost on those readers who are thinking of plot and incidents rather than the enjoyment they are getting from a superior style.

It is the monologue of a young man who is caught in his villa near Paris with a broken leg when the Germans are approaching Paris. Shutting himself up in the house, a small one hidden away in a park, he escapes the attentions of the enemy, but sees something of them, and is compelled to witness some of the feats of a peasant who takes revenge for the seizure of his farm and destruction of his house and barn by murdering sentries and unsuspecting German soldiers.

"Robert Helmont" has no love passages and is free from "passional crime," but it is a pleasure to read, owing to the beautiful style and fine descriptions of landscape and weather it contains. Instead of a robust oil painting in strong colors and with startling incidents, like some of the long novels, this is a water-color full of pale hues and delicate modelling. The connoisseur may recognize the greater strain involved in painting the oil picture, but he is likely to prefer a water-color, which, although a sketch, is finished to the highest point.

CHARLES DE KAY.

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FROMONT AND RISLER.

BOOK FIRST.

I.

A WEDDING-PARTY AT CAFÉ VÉFOUR.

"MADAME CHÈBE!"

"My boy—"

"I am very happy."

It was the twentieth time that day that the excellent Risler had said that he was very happy, and always with the same touched and contented manner, in the same moderate, low, deep voice,—the voice that is held in check by emotion and dares not speak too loud for fear of suddenly breaking into tears.

Not for anything in the world would Risler have wept at that moment,—imagine that newly-made husband giving way to his emotion in the midst of the wedding festival! And yet he had a strong inclination to do so. His happiness choked him, held him by the throat, prevented the words from coming forth. All that he could do was to mur-

mur from time to time, with a slight trembling of the lips, "I am very happy; I am very happy!"

Indeed, he had reason to be.

Since early morning the poor man had fancied that he was being whirled along in one of those gorgeous dreams from which one fears lest he may awake suddenly with blinded eyes; but it seemed to him as if this dream of his was never to end. It had begun at five o'clock in the morning, and at ten o'clock at night, exactly ten o'clock by Véfour's clock, it was still in progress.

How many things had happened during that day, and how vividly he remembered the most trivial details!

He saw himself, at daybreak, striding up and down his bachelor quarters, with delight mingled with impatience, already shaven, his coat upon his back, two pairs of white gloves in his pocket. Then there were the state equipages, and in the foremost one yonder, — the one with white horses, white reins, and a yellow damask lining, — the bride, in her finery, floating by like a cloud. Then the procession into the church, two by two, the white veil still leading, ethereal, and dazzling to behold. The organ, the verger, the curé's sermon, the tapers casting their light upon jewels and spring dresses, and the throng of people in the sacristy, the tiny white cloud swallowed up, surrounded, embraced, while the husband distributed handshakes among all the leading tradesmen of Paris, who had assembled to do him honor. And the grand crash from the organ at the close, made

more solemn by the fact that the church door was thrown wide open, so that the whole street took part in the family ceremony, — the music passing through the vestibule at the same time with the procession, — the exclamations of the crowd, and a burnisher in an ample lutestring apron remarking in a loud voice, "The groom is n't handsome, but the bride's as pretty as a picture." That is the kind of thing that makes you proud when you happen to be the bridegroom.

And then the breakfast at the factory, in a workroom adorned with hangings and flowers; the drive in the Bois, — a concession to the wishes of his mother-in-law, Madame Chèbe, who, being the petty Parisian bourgeoise that she was, would not have deemed her daughter legally married without a drive around the lake and a visit to the Cascade. Then the return for dinner, as the lamps were being lighted along the boulevard, where people turned to look after the wedding-party, a typical well-to-do bourgeois wedding-party, as it drove up to the grand entrance at Véfour's with all the style the livery horses could command.

He had reached that point in his dream.

And now the worthy Risler, dazed with fatigue and well-being, glanced vaguely about that huge table of twenty-four covers, curved in the shape of a horseshoe at the ends, and surrounded by smiling, familiar faces, wherein he seemed to see his happiness reflected in every eye. The dinner was drawing near its end. The wave of private conversations flowed around the table. Faces were

turned toward each other, black sleeves stole behind waists adorned with bunches of asclepias, a childish face laughed over a fruit ice, and the dessert at the level of the guests' lips encompassed the cloth with animation, bright colors, and light.

Ah! yes, Risler was very happy.

Except his brother Frantz, everybody he loved was there. First of all, sitting opposite him, was Sidonie, — yesterday little Sidonie, to-day his wife. For the purposes of dinner she had laid aside her veil; she had emerged from her cloud. Now, above the smooth, white silk dress, appeared a pretty face of a less lustrous and softer white, and the crown of hair — beneath that other crown so carefully bestowed — would have told you of a tendency to rebel against life, of little feathers asking but an opportunity to fly away. But husbands do not see such things as those.

Next to Sidonie and Frantz, the person whom Risler loved best in the world was Madame Georges Fromont, whom he called "Madame Chorche," the wife of his partner and the daughter of the late Fromont, his former employer and his god. He had placed her beside him, and in his manner of speaking to her one could read affection and deference. She was a very young woman, of about the same age as Sidonie, but of a more regular, more placid type of beauty. She talked but little, being out of her element in that conglomerate assemblage; but she tried to appear affable.

On Risler's other side sat Madame Chèbe, the

bride's mother, radiant and gorgeous in her dress of green satin, which gleamed like a shield. Ever since the morning the good woman's every thought had been as brilliant as that robe of emblematic hue. At every moment she said to herself: "My daughter is marrying Fromont Jeune and Risler Aîné, of Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes!" For, in her mind, it was not Risler alone whom her daughter took for her husband, but the whole sign of the establishment, illustrious in the commercial annals of Paris; and whenever she mentally announced that glorious event, Madame Chèbe sat more erect than ever, stretching the silk of the buckler until it almost cracked.

What a contrast to the attitude of Monsieur Chèbe, who was seated a few chairs away! In different households, as a general rule, the same causes produce altogether different results. That little man, with the high forehead of a visionary, as inflated and hollow as a garden ball, was as fierce in appearance as his wife was radiant. That was nothing unusual, by the way, for Monsieur Chèbe was in a frenzy the whole year long. On this particular evening, however, he did not wear his customary woebegone, lack-lustre expression, nor the ample-skirted coat, with the pockets sticking out behind, filled to repletion with samples of oil, wine, truffles or vinegar, according as he happened to be dealing in one or the other of those articles. His black coat, new and magnificent, made a fitting pendant to the green dress; but unfortunately his thoughts were of the color of his coat. Why had

they not seated him beside the bride, as was his right? Why had they given his seat to young Fromont? And there was old Gardinois, the Fromonts' grandfather, what business had he by Sidonie's side? Ah! that 's how it was to be! Everything for the Fromonts and nothing for the Chèbes! And yet those people are amazed that there are such things as revolutions!

Luckily the little man had by his side, to vent his spleen upon, his friend Delobelle, an old retired actor, who listened to him with his serene and majestic holiday countenance. No matter if one has been kept off the stage fifteen years by the malice of managers, one can still command, when occasion requires, theatrical attitudes appropriate to the events of the hour. So it was that on this evening Delobelle wore his wedding-feast physiognomy, a half-serious, half-smiling expression, condescending to the unimportant members of the party, at once unconstrained and solemn. You would have said that he was taking part, in presence of a whole theatre-full of spectators in a first act banquet with pasteboard viands; and he had even more the appearance of playing a part, had the whimsical Delobelle, because, knowing well that his talent would be made use of during the evening, he had, ever since they had taken their places at table, been going over in his mind the choicest pieces in his repertory, — an occupation which gave to his features a vague, artificial, wandering expression, the falsely attentive air of the actor on the stage, pretending to listen to what is being said

to him, but all the time thinking of nothing but his cue.

Strangely enough, the bride herself had something of that same expression. On that youthful and pretty face, which happiness enlivened without making glad, there appeared indications of some secret preoccupation; and, at times, the corners of her lips quivered with a smile, as if she were talking to herself.

With that same little smile she replied to the somewhat pronounced pleasantries of grandfather Gardinois, who sat by her side.

"This Sidonie, on my word!" said the goodman with a laugh. "When I think that not two months ago she was talking about going into a convent. We all know what sort of convents such minxes as she go to! As the saying is in our province: *The Convent of St. Joseph, four shoes under the bed!*"

And everybody at the table laughed heartily at the rustic jests of the old Berrichon peasant, whose colossal fortune filled the place of manliness, of education, of kindness of heart, but not of wit; for he had plenty of that, the rascal, — more than all his bourgeois fellow-guests together. Among the very rare persons who inspired a sympathetic feeling in his breast, little Chèbe, whom he had known as a little urchin, appealed particularly to him; and she, for her part, having become rich too recently not to venerate wealth, talked to her right-hand neighbor with a very perceptible air of respect and coquetry.

With her left-hand neighbor, on the contrary,

Georges Fromont, her husband's partner, she exhibited the utmost reserve. Their conversation was restricted to the ordinary courtesies of the table; indeed there was a sort of affectation of indifference between them.

Suddenly there was that little commotion among the guests which indicates that they are about to rise, the rustling of silk, the moving of chairs, the last words of conversations, the completion of a laugh, and in that half-silence Madame Chèbe, who had become communicative, observed in a very loud tone to a provincial cousin, who was gazing in an ecstasy of admiration at the newly-made bride's reserved and tranquil demeanor, as she stood with her arm in Monsieur Gardinois's:

"You see that child, cousin — well, no one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were."

Thereupon the whole party rose and repaired to the grand salon.

While the guests invited for the ball were arriving in crowds and mingling with the dinner-guests, while the orchestra was tuning up, while the waltzers, eye-glass in position, strutted in front of the white gowns of the impatient damsels, the bridegroom, awed by so great a throng, had taken refuge with his friend Planus — Sigismond Planus, cashier of the house of Fromont for thirty years past — in that little gallery decorated with flowers and hung with a paper representing shrubbery and clambering vines, which forms a sort of background of verdure to Véfour's gilded salons.

"Sigismond, old friend — I am very happy."

And Sigismond too was happy; but Risler did not give him time to say so. Now that he was no longer in dread of weeping before his guests, all the joy in his heart overflowed.

"Just think of it, my friend! — It's so extraordinary that a young girl like her would consent to have me. For you know, I'm not handsome. I did n't need to have that impudent creature tell me so this morning to know it. And then I'm forty-two — and she such a dear little thing! There were so many others she might have chosen, among the youngest and the richest, to say nothing of my poor Frantz, who loved her so. But, no, she preferred her old Risler. And it came about so queerly. For a long time I noticed that she was sad, greatly changed. I felt sure there was some disappointment in love at the bottom of it. Her mother and I, we looked about, we cudgelled our brains to find out what it could be. One morning Madame Chèbe came into my room crying, and said: 'You're the man she loves, my dear friend!' — And I was the man, — I was the man. Bless my soul! Whoever would have suspected such a thing? And to think that in the same year I had those two great pieces of good fortune — a partner in the house of Fromont and married to Sidonie — Oh!"

At that moment, to the strains of a giddy, languishing waltz, a couple whirled into the small salon. They were Risler's bride and his partner, Georges Fromont. Equally young and attractive,

they were talking in undertones, confining their words within the narrow circle of the waltz.

"You lie," said Sidonie, slightly pale, but with the same little smile.

And the other, paler than she, replied:

"I do not lie. It was my uncle who insisted upon this marriage. He was dying—you had gone away. I dared not say no."

Risler, at a distance, gazed at them in admiration.

"How pretty she is! How well they dance!"

But, when they spied him, the dancers separated, and Sidonie walked quickly to him.

"What! You here? What are you doing? They are looking everywhere for you. Why are n't you in there?"

As she spoke she re-tied his cravat with a pretty, impatient gesture. That enchanted Risler, who smiled at Sigismond from the corner of his eye, too overjoyed at feeling the touch of that little gloved hand on his neck, to notice that she was trembling to the ends of her slender fingers.

"Give me your arm," she said to him, and they returned together to the salons. The white dress with its long train made the badly-cut, awkwardly worn black coat, appear even more uncouth; but a coat cannot be re-tied like a cravat; she must needs take it as it was. As they passed along, returning the salutations of all the guests who were so anxious to smile upon them, Sidonie had a momentary thrill of pride, of satisfied vanity. Unhappily it did not last. In a corner of the salon sat a young and attractive woman whom no-

body invited to dance, and who looked on at the dances with a placid eye, illumined by all the joy of a first maternity. As soon as he saw her, Risler walked straight to where she sat and compelled Sidonie to sit beside her. Needless to say that it was Madame "Chorche." To what other would he have spoken with such affectionate respect? In what other hand than hers could he have placed his little Sidonie's, saying, "You will love her dearly, won't you? You are so good. She needs your advice, your knowledge of the world."

"Why, my dear Risler," Madame Georges replied, "Sidonie and I are old friends. We have reason to be fond of each other still."

And her calm, straightforward glance strove unsuccessfully to meet that of her old friend.

With his utter ignorance of women and his habit of treating Sidonie as a child, Risler continued in the same tone:

"Take her for your model, little one. There are not two people in the world like Madame Chorche. She has her poor father's heart. A true Fromont!"

Sidonie, with her eyes cast down, bowed without replying, while an imperceptible shudder ran from the tip of her satin shoe to the topmost bit of orange blossom in her crown. But honest Risler saw nothing. The excitement, the dancing, the music, all the flowers, all the lights. He was drunk, he was mad. He believed that everybody else breathed the same atmosphere of bliss beyond compare which enveloped him. He had

no perception of the rivalries, the petty hatreds that met and passed one another above all those bejewelled foreheads.

He did not see Delobelle, standing with his elbow on the mantel, one hand in the armhole of his waistcoat and his hat upon his hip, weary of his eternal attitudinizing, while the hours slipped by and no one thought of utilizing his talents. He did not notice M. Chèbe, who was prowling darkly between the two doors, more incensed than ever against the Fromonts. Oh! those Fromonts! — How large a place they filled at that wedding! They were all there with their wives, their children, their friends, their friends' friends. One would have said that one of themselves was being married. Who had a word to say of the Rislers or the Chèbes? Why, he, he, the father, had not even been presented! — And the little man's rage was redoubled by the attitude of Madame Chèbe, smiling maternally upon one and all in her scarab-hued dress.

Furthermore, there were at this, as at almost all wedding-parties, two quite distinct currents which came together without mingling. One of the two soon gave place to the other. The Fromonts, who irritated Monsieur Chèbe so much and who formed the aristocracy of the ball, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the syndic of the solicitors, a famous chocolate manufacturer and member of the Corps Législatif, and the old millionaire Gardinois, all retired shortly after midnight. Georges Fromont and his wife en-

tered their coupé behind them. Only the Risler and Chèbe party remained, and the festivity at once changed its aspect, becoming more uproarious.

The illustrious Delobelle, disgusted to see that no one called upon him for anything, decided to call upon himself for something, and began in a voice as resonant as a gong the monologue from Ruy Blas: "Good appetite, messieurs!" — while the guests thronged to the buffet, spread with chocolate and glasses of punch. Inexpensive little costumes were displayed upon the benches, overjoyed to produce their due effect at last; and here and there divers young shop-clerks, consumed with dandyism, amused themselves by venturing upon a quadrille. The bride had long wished to take her leave. At last she disappeared with Risler and Madame Chèbe. As for Monsieur Chèbe, who had recovered all his importance, it was impossible to induce him to go. Some one must be there to do the honors, deuce take it! And I promise you that the little man assumed the responsibility! He was flushed, lively, frolicsome, noisy, almost seditious. On the floor below he could be heard talking politics with Véfour's head waiter, and making such audacious statements!

Through the deserted streets the wedding carriage, the tired coachman holding the white reins somewhat loosely, rolled heavily toward the Marais.

Madame Chèbe talked continuously, enumerating all the splendors of that memorable day, rhapsodizing especially over the dinner, the com-

monplace menu of which had been to her the highest expression of magnificence. Sidonie mused in the darkness of the carriage, and Risler, sitting opposite her, even though he no longer said: "I am very happy," continued to think it with all his heart. Once he tried to take possession of a little white hand that rested against the closed window, but it was hastily withdrawn, and he sat there without moving, lost in mute admiration.

They drove through the Halles and Rue de Rambuteau, thronged with kitchen-gardeners' wagons; and, near the end of Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, they turned the corner of the Archives into Rue de Braque. There they stopped first, and Madame Chèbe alighted at her door, which was too narrow for the magnificent green silk dress, so that it vanished in the hall with rustlings of revolt and with all its folds muttering. A few minutes later, a tall massive portal on Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, bearing on the escutcheon that betrayed the former family mansion, beneath half-effaced armorial bearings, a sign in blue letters:

WALL PAPERS,

was thrown wide open to allow the wedding carriage to pass through.

Thereupon the bride, hitherto motionless and like one asleep, seemed to awake suddenly, and if all the lights in the vast buildings, workshops or storehouses, which surrounded the courtyard,

had not been extinguished, Risler might have seen that pretty, enigmatical face suddenly lighted by a smile of triumph. The wheels revolved less noisily on the fine gravel of a garden, and soon stopped before the stoop of a small house of two floors. It was there that the young Fromonts lived, and Risler and his wife were to take up their abode on the floor above. The house had an aristocratic air. Flourishing commerce avenged itself therein for the dismal street and the out-of-the-way quarter. There was a carpet on the stairway leading to their apartment, and on all sides the gleaming whiteness of marble, the reflection of mirrors and polished copper.

While Risler was parading his delight through all the rooms of the new apartment, Sidonie remained alone in her bedroom. By the light of the little blue lamp hanging from the ceiling, she glanced first of all at the mirror, which gave back her reflection from head to foot, at all her luxurious surroundings, so unfamiliar to her; then, instead of going to bed, she opened the window and stood leaning against the sill, motionless as a statue.

The night was clear and warm. She could see distinctly the whole factory, its innumerable unshaded windows, its glistening panes, its tall chimney losing itself in the depths of the sky, and nearer at hand the lovely little garden against the ancient wall of the former mansion. All about were gloomy, miserable roofs, squalid, squalid streets. Suddenly she started. Yonder, in the

darkest, the ugliest of all those attics crowding so closely together, leaning against one another as if overweighted with misery, a fifth floor window stood wide open, showing only darkness within. She recognized it at once. It was the window of the landing on which her parents lived.

The window on the landing!

How many things the mere name recalled! How many hours, how many days she had passed there, leaning on that damp sill, without rail or balcony, looking toward the factory. At that moment she fancied that she could see up yonder little Chèbe's ragged person, and in the frame made by that poor window, her whole child life, her deplorable youth as a Parisian street Arab, passed before her eyes.

II.

LITTLE CHÈBE'S STORY. THREE FAMILIES ON ONE LANDING.

IN Paris the common landing is like an additional room, an enlargement of their abodes, to poor families confined in their too small apartments. There it is that they go to get a breath of air in summer, there the women talk and the children play.

When little Chèbe made too much noise in the house, her mother would say to her: "There, there! you bother me, go and play on the landing." And the child would go quickly enough.

This landing, on the upper floor of an old house in which space had not been spared, formed a sort of large lobby, with a high ceiling, guarded on the staircase side by a wrought-iron rail, lighted by a large window which looked out upon roofs, courtyards and other windows, and, farther away, upon the garden of the Fromont factory, which was like a green oasis among the huge old walls.

There was nothing very enlivening about it all, but the child liked it much better than her own home. Their rooms were so dismal, especially when it rained and Ferdinand did not go out.

His brain always smoking with new ideas, which unfortunately never came to anything, Ferdinand Chèbe was one of those slothful, project-devising bourgeois of whom there are so many in Paris. His wife, whom he had dazzled at first, had soon detected his utter insignificance, and had ended by enduring patiently and with unchanged demeanor his continual dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed them.

Of the dowry of eighty thousand francs which she had brought him and which he had squandered in his absurd schemes, there remained only a small annuity, which still gave them a position of some importance in the eyes of their neighbors, as did Madame Chèbe's cashmere, which had been rescued from every shipwreck, her wedding laces and two diamond studs, very tiny and very modest, which Sidonie sometimes begged her mother to show her, as they lay in the drawer of the commode, in an old-fashioned white velvet case, on which the jeweller's name in gilt letters thirty years old, was gradually vanishing. That was the only bit of luxury in that poor annuitant's abode.

For a long, a very long time Monsieur Chèbe had sought a place which would enable him to eke out their slender income. But he sought it only in what he called *standing business*, his health forbidding any occupation that required him to be seated.

It seemed that, soon after his marriage, when he was in a flourishing business and had a horse

and tilbury of his own, the little man had one day a serious fall from his carriage. That fall, to which he referred upon every occasion, served as an excuse for his indolence.

One could not be with Monsieur Chèbe five minutes that he would not say in a confidential tone:

"You know of the accident that happened to the Duc d'Orléans?"

And then he would add, tapping his little bald pate:

"The same thing happened to me in my youth."

Since that famous fall any sort of office work made him dizzy, and he had found himself inexorably relegated to *standing business.* Thus, he had been in turn a broker in wines, in books, in truffles, in clocks, and in many other things beside. Unluckily he tired of everything, never considered his position sufficiently exalted for a former business man with a tilbury, and, by gradual degrees, by dint of deeming every sort of occupation beneath him, he had grown old and incapable, a genuine idler with loaferish tastes, a zany.

Artists are often rebuked for their oddities, for the liberties they take with nature, for that horror of the conventional which impels them to follow bypaths; but who can ever describe all the absurd fancies, all the idiotic eccentricities with which a bourgeois without occupation can succeed in filling the emptiness of his life? Monsieur Chèbe imposed upon himself certain laws concerning his goings and comings, his walks abroad. All the while

that the Boulevard Sébastopol was being built, he went twice a day "to see if it was getting on."

No one knew better than he the fashionable shops and the bargains; and very often Madame Chèbe, annoyed to see her husband's idiotic face at the window while she was energetically mending the family linen, would rid herself of him by giving him an errand to do. "You know that place, on the corner of such a street, where they sell such nice cakes. They'd be nice for our dessert."

And the husband would go out, saunter along the boulevard by the shops, wait for the omnibus, and pass half the day in procuring two cakes worth three sous, which he would bring home in triumph, wiping his forehead.

Monsieur Chèbe adored the summer, the Sundays, the great foot-races in the dust at Clamart or Romainville, the excitement of holidays and the crowd. He was one of those who went about for a whole week before the fifteenth of August, gazing at the black lamps and their frames, and the scaffoldings. Nor did his wife complain. At all events she no longer had that chronic grumbler prowling around her chair for whole days, with schemes for gigantic enterprises, combinations that missed fire in advance, lamentations concerning the past, and a fixed determination not to earn money.

She no longer earned anything herself, poor woman; but she knew so well how to save, her wonderful economy made up so completely for everything else, that absolute want, although a

near neighbor of such impecuniosity as theirs, never succeeded in making its way into those three rooms, which were always neat and clean, or in destroying the carefully mended garments or the old furniture concealed beneath its coverings.

Opposite the Chèbes' door, whose copper knob gleamed in bourgeois fashion upon the landing, there were two other and smaller ones.

On the first, a visiting card held in place by four nails, according to the custom in vogue among industrial artists, bore the name of

RISLER

DESIGNER OF PATTERNS.

On the other was a small square of leather with these words in gilt letters:

MESDAMES DELOBELLE

BIRDS AND INSECTS FOR ORNAMENT.

The Delobelles' door was often open and disclosed a large room with a brick floor, where two women, mother and daughter, the latter almost a child, each as weary and as pale as the other, worked at one of the thousand fanciful little trades which go to make up what is called the *Article de Paris.*

It was then the fashion to ornament hats and ball dresses with the lovely little insects from South America, which have the brilliant coloring

of jewels and reflect the light like diamonds. The Delobelles had adopted that specialty.

A wholesale house, to whom consignments were made directly from the Antilles, sent to them, unopened, the long, light boxes from which, when the lid was removed, arose a faint odor, a dust of arsenic through which gleamed the piles of insects, impaled before being shipped, the birds packed closely together, their wings held in place by a strip of thin paper. They must all be mounted, — the insects quivering upon brass wire, the humming-birds with their feathers ruffled; — they must be cleaned and polished, the break in a bright-red claw repaired with a silk thread, dead eyes replaced with sparkling pearls, and the insect or the bird restored to an appearance of life and grace.

The mother prepared the work under her daughter's direction; for Désirée, though she was still a mere girl, was endowed with exquisite taste, with a fairy-like power of invention, and no one could insert two pearl-eyes in those tiny heads or spread their lifeless wings so deftly as she.

Lame from childhood, as the result of an accident which had in no wise impaired the charm of her refined and regular features, Désirée Delobelle owed to her almost enforced immobility, to her constant disinclination to go out, a certain aristocratic coloring and the whitest of hands. With her hair always becomingly arranged, she passed her days in the depths of a great easy chair, beside her table laden with fashion-plates and birds of all hues, finding in the fanciful and worldly elegance

of her trade a means of forgetting her own distress and a sort of vengeance for her disfigured life.

She reflected that all those tiny wings were about to fly away from her table to undertake real voyages around the Parisian world, to sparkle at balls and parties, beneath the great chandeliers; and simply by the way she set up her insects and her birds one could have guessed the tenor of her thoughts. In the days of depression and melancholy the tapering beaks were stretched forward, the wings were spread to their fullest extent, as if to fly with a mighty impulse, far, far away from fifth floor lodgings, from air-tight stoves, from privation and want. At other times, when she was happy, her insects had the appearance of being overjoyed to live, the saucy swaggering air of a trivial caprice of fashion.

Happy or unhappy, Désirée always worked with the same energy. From dawn until well into the night the table was covered with work. At the last ray of daylight, when the factory bells were ringing in all the neighboring yards, Madame Delobelle lighted the lamp, and after a more than frugal repast they returned to their work.

Those two indefatigable women had one object, one fixed idea, which prevented them from feeling the burden of enforced vigils. That idea was the dramatic renown of the illustrious Delobelle.

After he had left the provincial theatres to pursue his profession in Paris, Delobelle waited for an intelligent manager, the ideal and providential manager who discovers geniuses, to seek him out

and offer him a part suited to his talents. He might, perhaps, especially at the beginning, have obtained a passably good engagement at a theatre of the third order, but Delobelle did not choose to lower himself.

He preferred to wait, to struggle, as he said! And this is how he awaited the struggle.

In the morning in his bedroom, often in his bed, he rehearsed rôles in his former repertory; and the Delobelle ladies trembled with emotion when they heard behind the partition tirades from *Antony* or the *Médecin des Enfants*, declaimed in a sonorous voice that blended with the thousand and one noises of the great Parisian bee-hive. Then, after breakfast, the actor would sally forth for the day; would go to "do his boulevard," that is to say, to saunter back and forth between the Château d'Eau and the Madeleine, with a tooth-pick in the corner of his mouth, his hat a little on one side, — always gloved and brushed and glossy.

That question of dress was of great importance in his eyes. It was one of the greatest elements of success, a bait for the manager, — the famous, intelligent manager, — who would never dream of engaging a threadbare, shabbily dressed man.

So the Delobelle ladies took good care that he lacked nothing; and you can imagine how many birds and insects it required to fit out a blade of that temper! The actor thought it the most natural thing in the world.

In his view, the labors, the privations of his wife and daughter were not, strictly speaking, for his

benefit, but for the benefit of that mysterious and unknown genius, whose trustee he considered himself in some sense to be.

There was a certain analogy between the position of the Chèbe family and that of the Delobelles. But the latter household was less depressing. The Chèbes felt that their petty annuitant existence was fastened upon them forever, with no prospect of amelioration, always the same; whereas, in the actor's family, hope and illusion often opened magnificent vistas.

The Chèbes were like people living in a blind alley; the Delobelles on a foul little street, where there was no light or air, but where a great boulevard might some day be laid out. And then, too, Madame Chèbe no longer believed in her husband, whereas, by virtue of that single magic word, "Art!" her neighbor had never doubted hers.

And yet for years and years Monsieur Delobelle had been unavailingly drinking vermouth with dramatic agents, absinthe with leaders of claques, bitters with vaudevillists, dramatists, and the famous what's-his-name, author of several great dramas.[1] Engagements did not always follow. So that, without once appearing on the boards, the poor man had progressed from *jeune premier* to *grand premier* rôles, then to the financiers, then to the noble fathers, then to the idiots —

He stopped there!

[1] *Le fameux machin, auteur de plusieurs grandes machines. Machin* is an expression used when one cannot recollect a person's name, and *machines* in theatrical slang means dramatic works.

On two or three occasions his friends had obtained for him a chance to earn his living as manager of a club or a café, as an inspector in great warehouses, at the *Phares de la Bastille* or the *Colosse de Rhodes.* All that was necessary was to have good manners. Delobelle was not lacking in that respect, God knows! And yet every suggestion that was made to him the great man met with an heroic refusal.

"I have no right to abandon the stage!" he would say.

In the mouth of that poor devil, who had not set foot on the boards for years, it was irresistibly comical. But one lost the inclination to laugh when one saw his wife and his daughter swallowing particles of arsenic day and night, and heard them repeat emphatically as they broke their needles against the brass wire with which the little birds were mounted:

"No! no! Monsieur Delobelle has no right to abandon the stage."

Happy man, whose bulging eyes, always smiling condescendingly, and whose habit of reigning on the stage had procured for him for life that exceptional position of a spoiled and admired child-king! When he left the house, the shopkeepers on Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, with the predilection of the Parisian for everything and everybody connected with the theatre, saluted him respectfully. He was always so well dressed! And then he was so kind, so obliging! When you think that every Saturday night, he, Ruy Blas, Antony, Raphael in

the *Filles de Marbre*, Andrès in the *Pirates de la Savane*, sallied forth, with a bandbox under his arm, to carry the week's work of his wife and daughter to a flower establishment on Rue Saint-Denis!

Why, even when performing such a commission as that, the devil of a fellow had such nobility of bearing, such native dignity, that the young woman whose duty it was to make up the Delobelle account was sorely embarrassed to hand to such an irreproachable gentleman the paltry stipend so laboriously earned.

On those evenings, by the way, the actor did not return home to dinner. The women were forewarned. He always met some old comrade on the boulevard, some unlucky devil like himself, — there are so many of them in that sacred profession, — whom he entertained at a restaurant or café. Then, with scrupulous fidelity, — and very grateful they were to him, — he would carry the rest of the money home, sometimes with a bouquet for his wife or a little present for Désirée, a nothing, a mere trifle. What would you have? Those are the customs of the stage. It is such a simple matter in a melodrama to toss a handful of louis through the window!

"Ho! varlet, take this purse and hie thee hence to tell thy mistress I await her coming."

And so, notwithstanding their marvellous courage, and although their trade was quite lucrative, the Delobelles often found themselves in straitened circumstances, especially in the dull season of the *Article de Paris*.

Luckily the excellent Risler was at hand, always ready to accommodate his friends.

Guillaume Risler, the third tenant on the landing, lived with his brother Frantz, who was some fifteen years his junior. The two young Swiss, tall and fair and strong and ruddy, brought into the dismal, hard-working house glimpses of the country and of health. The elder was a draughtsman at the Fromont factory and was paying for the education of his brother, who attended Chaptal's lectures, pending his admission to the École Centrale.

On his arrival at Paris, being sadly perplexed as to the installation of his little household, Guillaume had derived from the neighborhood of Mesdames Chèbe and Delobelle advice and information which were an indispensable assistance to that ingenuous, timid, somewhat heavy youth, embarrassed by his foreign accent and manner. After a brief period of neighborhood and mutual services, the Risler brothers formed a part of both families.

On holidays covers were always laid for them in one place or the other, and it was a great satisfaction to the two exiles to find in those poor households, modest and straitened as they were, a taste of affection and family life.

The pay of the designer, who was very clever at his trade, enabled him to be of service to the Delobelles on rent-day, and to make his appearance at the Chèbes in the guise of the rich uncle, always laden with surprises and presents, so that

the little girl, as soon as she saw him, would run to his pockets and climb on his knees.

On Sunday he would take them all to the theatre; and almost every evening he would go with Messieurs Chèbe and Delobelle to a brewery on Rue Blondel, where he regaled them with beer and pretzels. Beer and pretzels were his one vice.

For his own part, he knew no greater bliss than to sit before a foaming pewter, between his two friends, listening to their talk, and taking part only by a loud laugh or a shake of the head in their conversation, which was generally a long succession of grievances against society.

A childlike shyness and the germanisms of speech which he never laid aside in his life of absorbing toil, embarrassed him much in giving expression to his ideas. Moreover his friends overawed him. They had in respect to him the tremendous superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works; and Monsieur Chèbe, less generous than Delobelle, did not hesitate to make him feel it. He was very lofty with him, was Monsieur Chèbe! In his view, a man who worked, as Risler did, ten hours a day, was incapable, when he left his work, of expressing an intelligent opinion. Sometimes the designer, coming home worried from the factory, would prepare to pass the night over some urgent work. You should have seen Monsieur Chèbe's scandalized expression then!

"Nobody could make *me* follow such a trade!" he would say, throwing out his chest; and he would

add, looking Risler in the eye with the air of a doctor making a professional visit: "Just wait till you 've had one sharp attack."

Delobelle was not so fierce, but he adopted a still loftier tone.

"The cedar does not see a rose at its foot."

Delobelle did not see Risler at his feet.

When, by chance, he deigned to notice his presence, the great man had a certain air of stooping down to him to listen, and to smile at his words as at a child's; or else he would amuse himself by dazzling him with stories of actresses, would give him lessons in deportment and the addresses of outfitters, unable to understand why a man who earned so much money should always be dressed like an usher at a primary school. Honest Risler, convinced of his inferiority, would try to earn forgiveness by a multitude of trifling attentions, obliged to furnish all the delicacy, of course, as he was the constant benefactor.

Between these three households living on the same landing, little Chèbe with her perpetual goings and comings formed the bond of union.

At all hours of the day she would steal into the workroom of the Delobelles, amuse herself by watching their work and looking at all the insects, and, being already more coquettish than playful, if an insect had lost a wing in its travels, or a humming-bird its necklace of down, she would try to make herself a headdress of the remains, to fix that brilliant shaft of color among the ripples of her silky hair. It made Désirée and her mother

laugh to see her stand on tiptoe in front of the old tarnished mirror, with affected little shrugs and grimaces. Then, when she had had enough of her own admiration, the child would open the door with all the strength of her little fingers, and would go demurely, holding her head perfectly straight for fear of disarranging her head-dress, and knock at the Rislers' door.

No one was there in the daytime but Frantz the student, leaning over his books, doing his duty faithfully enough. Enter Sidonie; farewell to study then! Everything must be put aside to receive that lovely creature with the humming-bird in her hair, assumed to be a princess who had come to Chaptal's school to ask his hand in marriage from the director.

It was really a strange sight to see that tall overgrown boy playing with that little girl of eight, humoring her caprices, adoring her as he yielded to her, so that later, when he fell genuinely in love with her, no one could have said at what time the change began.

Petted as she was in those two homes, there always came a time when little Chèbe ran to the window on the landing. There it was that she found her greatest source of entertainment, a horizon always open, a sort of vision of the future toward which she leaned with eager curiosity and without fear, for children are not subject to vertigo.

Between the slated roofs sloping toward one another, the high wall of the factory, the tops of the plane-trees in the garden, the many-windowed

workshops appeared to her like a promised land, the country of her dreams.

That Fromont establishment was to her mind the highest embodiment of wealth.

The place that it occupied in that part of the Marais, which was at certain hours enveloped by its smoke and its din, Risler's enthusiasm, his fabulous tales concerning his employer's wealth and goodness and cleverness, had aroused that childish curiosity; and such portions as she could see of the dwelling-houses, the carved wooden blinds, the circular stoop, with the garden seats arranged in front, a great white bird-house with gilt stripes glistening in the sun, the blue-lined coupé standing in the courtyard, were to her objects of constant admiration.

She knew all the habits of the family: at what hour the bell was rung, when the workmen went away, the Saturday pay-day which kept the cashier's little lamp lighted well into the evening, and the long Sunday afternoon, the closed workshops, the smokeless chimney, the profound silence which enabled her to hear Mademoiselle Claire at play in the garden, running about with her cousin Georges. From Risler she obtained details.

"Show me the salon windows," she would say to him, "and Claire's room."

Risler, delighted by this extraordinary sympathetic interest in his beloved factory, would explain to the child from their lofty position the arrangement of the buildings, point out the print-shop, the gilding-shop, the designing room where he

worked, the engine-room, above which towered that enormous chimney which blackened all the neighboring walls with its corrosive smoke, and which of a surety never suspected that a young life, concealed beneath a roof near by, mingled its inmost thoughts with its loud, indefatigable breath.

One day Sidonie at last entered that paradise of which she had caught a glimpse.

Madame Fromont, to whom Risler often spoke of her little neighbor's beauty and intelligence, asked him to bring her to the children's ball she was preparing to give at Christmas. At first Monsieur Chèbe replied by a curt refusal. Even in those days, the Fromonts, whose name was always on Risler's lips, irritated and humiliated him by their wealth. Moreover, it was to be a fancy ball, and Monsieur Chèbe — who did not sell wall-papers, not he! — could not afford to dress his daughter as a rope-dancer. But Risler insisted, declared that he would take everything upon himself, and at once set about designing a costume.

It was a memorable evening.

In Madame Chèbe's bedroom, littered with pieces of cloth and pins and small toilet articles, Désirée Delobelle superintended Sidonie's toilet. The child, made taller by her short skirt of red flannel with black stripes, stood before the mirror, erect and motionless, in the glittering splendor of her costume. She was charming. The waist with bands of velvet laced over the white stomacher,

was able to see near at hand the carved blinds, the dovecot with its threads of gold. She came to know all the corners and hiding places in the vast factory and took part in many glorious games of hide-and-seek behind the printing tables in the solitude of Sunday afternoon. On holidays a cover was laid for her at the children's table.

Everybody loved her, although she never exhibited much affection for anyone. So long as she was in the midst of that luxury, she was conscious of softer impulses, she was happy and felt that she was embellished by her surroundings, as it were; but when she returned to her parents, when she saw the factory through the dirty panes of the window on the landing, she had an inexplicable feeling of regret and anger.

And yet Claire Fromont treated her as a friend.

Sometimes they took her to the Bois, to the Tuileries, in the famous blue-lined coupé, or into the country, to pass a whole week at Grandfather Gardinois's château, at Savigny-sur-Orge. Thanks to the munificence of Risler, who was very proud of his little one's success, she was always presentable and well-supplied. Madame Chèbe made it a point of honor, and the pretty lame girl was always at hand to place her treasures of unused coquetry at her little friend's service.

But Monsieur Chèbe, who was always hostile to the Fromonts, looked frowningly upon this growing intimacy. The true reason was that he himself was never invited; but he gave other reasons and would say to his wife:

"Don't you see that your daughter's heart is heavy when she returns from that house, and that she passes whole hours dreaming at the window?"

But poor Madame Chèbe, who had been so unhappy ever since her marriage, had become reckless. She declared that one should make the most of the present for fear of the future, should seize happiness when it passes within reach, as one often has no other support and consolation in life than the memory of a happy childhood.

For once it happened that Monsieur Chèbe was right.

III.

LITTLE CHÈBE'S STORY—THE FALSE PEARLS.

AFTER two or three years of intimacy with Claire, of sharing her amusements, years during which Sidonie acquired the familiarity with luxury and the graceful manners of the children of the wealthy, the friendship was suddenly broken.

Cousin Georges, whose guardian M. Fromont was, had entered college some time before. Claire in her turn took her departure for the convent with the outfit of a little queen; and at that very moment the Chèbes were discussing the question of apprenticing Sidonie to some trade. They promised to love each other as before and to meet twice a month, on the Sundays when Claire was allowed to go home.

Indeed little Chèbe did still go down sometimes to play with her friends; but as she grew older she realized more fully the distance that separated them, and her dresses began to seem to her very simple for Madame Fromont's salon.

When the three were alone, the childish friendship which made them equals prevented any feeling of embarrassment; but visitors came, girl friends from the convent, among others a tall girl,

always richly dressed, whom her mother's maid used to bring to play with the little Fromonts on Sunday.

As soon as she saw her coming up the steps, resplendent and disdainful, Sidonie longed to go away at once. The other embarrassed her with awkward questions. Where did she live? What did her parents do? Had she a carriage?

As she listened to their talk of the convent and their friends, Sidonie felt that they lived in a different world, a thousand leagues from her own; and a deathly sadness seized her, especially when, on her return home, her mother spoke of sending her as an apprentice to Mademoiselle Le Mire, a friend of the Delobelles, who conducted a large false pearl establishment on Rue du Roi-Doré.

Risler insisted upon the plan of having the little one serve an apprenticeship. "Let her learn a trade," said the honest fellow. "Later I will undertake to set her up in business."

Indeed this same Mademoiselle Le Mire talked of retiring in a few years. It was an excellent opportunity.

One morning, a dull morning in November, her father took her to Rue du Roi-Doré, to the fourth floor of an old house, even older and blacker than her own home.

On the ground floor, at the entrance to the hall, hung a number of signs with gilt letters: *Depot for Travelling Bags, Plated Chains, Children's Toys, Mathematical Instruments in Glass, Bouquets for Brides and Maids of Honor, Wild Flowers a*

Specialty; and above, a little dusty show-case, wherein pearls yellow with age, glass grapes and cherries surrounded the pretentious name of Angélina Le Mire.

Such a horrible house!

It had not even a broad landing like that of the Chèbes, grimy with old age, but brightened by its window and the beautiful prospect presented by the factory. A narrow staircase, a narrow door, a succession of rooms with brick floors, all small and cold, and in the last an old maid with a false front and black thread mitts, reading a soiled copy of the *Journal pour Tous*, and apparently very much annoyed to be disturbed in her reading.

Mademoiselle Le Mire (written in two words) received the father and daughter without rising, discoursed at great length of the position she had lost, of her father, an old nobleman of Le Rouergue — it is most extraordinary how many old noblemen Le Rouergue has already produced! — and of an unfaithful steward who had carried off their whole fortune. She instantly aroused the sympathies of Monsieur Chèbe, for whom decayed gentlefolk had an irresistible attraction, and the goodman went away overjoyed, promising his daughter to call for her at seven o'clock at night in accordance with the terms agreed upon.

The apprentice was at once ushered into the still empty workroom. Mademoiselle Le Mire seated her in front of a great drawer filled with pearls, needles, and bodkins, with instalments of four-sous novels thrown in at random among them.

It was Sidonie's business to sort the pearls and string them in necklaces of equal length, which were tied together to be sold to the small dealers. Then the young women would soon be there and they would show her exactly what she would have to do, for Mademoiselle Le Mire (written in two words) did not interfere at all, but overlooked her business from a considerable distance, from that dark room where she passed her life reading newspaper novels.

At nine o'clock the workwomen arrived, five tall, pale-faced, faded girls, wretchedly dressed, but with their hair becomingly arranged, after the fashion of poor working girls who go about bareheaded through the streets of Paris.

Two or three were yawning and rubbing their eyes, saying that they were dead with sleep. Who can say what they had done with their night?

At last they went to work beside a long table where each one had her own drawer and her own tools. An order had been received for mourning jewels, and haste was essential. Sidonie, whom the forewoman instructed in her task in a tone of infinite superiority, began dismally to sort a multitude of black pearls, bits of glass and wisps of crêpe.

The others, paying no attention to the urchin, chatted together as they worked. They talked of a wedding that was to take place that very day at Saint-Gervais.

"Suppose we go," said a stout, red-haired girl, whose name was Malvina. "It's to be at noon.

We shall have time to go and get back again if we hurry."

And, at the lunch hour, the whole party rushed downstairs four steps at a time.

Sidonie had brought her meal in a little basket, like a school-girl; with a heavy heart she sat at a corner of the table and ate alone for the first time in her life. Great God! what a sad and wretched thing life seemed to be, what a terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings there!

At one o'clock the girls trooped noisily back, highly excited.

"Did you see the white satin dress? And the veil of *point d'Angleterre?* There's a lucky girl!"

Thereupon they repeated in the workroom the remarks they had made in undertones in the church, leaning against the rail, throughout the ceremony. That question of a wealthy marriage, of beautiful clothes, lasted all day long; nor did it interfere with their work, far from it.

These small Parisian industries, which have to do with the most trivial details of the toilet, keep the work-girls posted as to the fashions and fill their minds everlastingly with thoughts of luxury and elegance. To the poor girls who worked on Mademoiselle Le Mire's fourth floor, the blackened walls, the narrow street did not exist. They were always thinking of something else and passed their lives asking one another:

"Say, Malvina, if you were rich what would you do? For my part I'd live on the Champs-Élysées." And the great trees on the square,

the carriages that turned about there, coquettishly slackening their pace, appeared momentarily before their minds, a delicious refreshing vision.

Little Chèbe, in her corner, listened without speaking, industriously stringing her black grapes with the precocious dexterity and taste she had acquired in Désirée's neighborhood. So that in the evening, when Monsieur Chèbe came to fetch his daughter, they praised her in the highest terms.

Thereafter all her days were alike. The next day, instead of black pearls, she strung white pearls and bits of false coral; for at Mademoiselle Le Mire's they worked only in what was false, in tinsel, and that was where little Chèbe was to serve her apprenticeship in life.

For some time the new apprentice — being younger and better bred than the others — found that they held aloof from her. Later, as she grew older, she was admitted to their friendship and their confidence, but without ever sharing their pleasures. She was too proud to go to see weddings at midday; and when she heard them talking of a ball at Vauxhall or the *Délices du Marais*, or of a nice little supper at Bonvalet's or at the *Quatre Sergents de la Rochelle*, she was always very disdainful.

We looked higher than that, did we not, little Chèbe?

Moreover, her father called for her every evening. Sometimes, however, about the New Year, she was obliged to work late with the others, in order to complete the urgent orders. In the gas-

light those pale-faced Parisians, sorting pearls as white as themselves, of a dead, unhealthy whiteness, were a painful spectacle. There was the same fictitious glitter, the same fragility of spurious jewels. They talked of nothing but masked balls and theatres.

"Have you seen Adèle Page, in the *Trois Mousquetaires?* And Mélingue? And Marie Laurent? Oh! Marie Laurent!"

The actors' doublets, the embroidered dresses of the queens of melodrama appeared before them in the white light of the necklaces forming beneath their fingers.

In summer the work was less pressing. It was the dull season. In the intense heat, when through the drawn blinds fruit vendors could be heard in the street, crying their *mirabelles* and *Queen Claudes*, the work-girls slept heavily, their heads on the table. Or perhaps Malvina would go and ask Mademoiselle Le Mire for a copy of the *Journal pour Tous*, and read aloud to the others.

But little Chèbe did not care for the novels. She carried one in her head much more interesting than all that trash.

The fact is that nothing could make her forget the factory. When she set forth in the morning on her father's arm, she always cast a glance in that direction. At that hour the works were just waking, the chimney emitted its first puff of black smoke. Sidonie, as she passed, could hear the shouts of the workmen, the dull, heavy blows of the bars of the printing-press, the mighty, rhyth-

mical hum of the machinery, and all those sounds of toil, blended in her memory with recollections of fêtes and blue-lined coupés, haunted her persistently.

They spoke louder than the rattle of the omnibuses, the street cries, the cascades in the gutters; and even in the workroom, when she was sorting the false pearls, even at night, in her own home, when she went, after dinner, to breathe the fresh air at the window on the landing and to gaze at the dark, deserted factory, that murmur still buzzed in her ears, forming, as it were, a constant accompaniment to her thoughts.

"The little one is tired, Madame Chèbe. She needs diversion. Next Sunday I will take you all into the country."

These Sunday excursions, which honest Risler organized to divert Sidonie, served only to sadden her still more.

On those days she must rise at four o'clock in the morning; for the poor must pay for all their enjoyments, and there was always a ribbon to be ironed at the last moment, or a bit of trimming to be sewn on in an attempt to rejuvenate the everlasting little lilac dress with white stripes which Madame Chèbe conscientiously lengthened every year.

They would all set off together, the Chèbes, the Rislers and the illustrious Delobelle. Only Désirée and her mother were never of the party. The poor crippled child, ashamed of her deformity, would never stir from her chair, and Mamma De-

lobelle stayed behind to keep her company. Moreover, neither of them possessed a suitable dress in which to show herself out-of-doors in their great man's company; it would have destroyed the whole effect of his appearance.

When they left the house, Sidonie would brighten up a little. Paris in the pink haze of a July morning, the railway stations filled with light dresses, the country flying past the car windows, and the healthful exercise, the bath in the pure air saturated with the water of the Seine, vivified by a bit of forest, perfumed by flowering meadows, by ripening grain, all combined to make her giddy for a moment. But that sensation was soon succeeded by disgust at such a commonplace way of passing her Sunday.

It was always the same thing.

They stopped at a refreshment booth, in close proximity to a very noisy and numerously attended rustic festival, for there must be an audience for Delobelle, who would saunter along, absorbed by his chimera, dressed in gray, with gray gaiters, a little hat over his ear, a light overcoat on his arm, imagining that the stage represented a country scene in the suburbs of Paris, and that he was playing the part of a Parisian sojourning in the country.

As for Monsieur Chèbe, who prided himself on being as fond of nature as the late Jean Jacques, he did not appreciate it without the accompaniments of shooting-matches, wooden horses, sack races, and a profusion of dust and penny-whistles,

which also constituted Madame Chèbe's ideal of a country life.

But Sidonie had a different ideal; and those Parisian Sundays passed in strolling through noisy village streets depressed her beyond measure. Her only pleasure in those crowds was the consciousness of being stared at. The veriest boor's admiration, frankly expressed aloud at her side, made her smile all day; for she was of those who disdain no compliment.

Sometimes, leaving the Chèbes and Delobelle in the midst of the fête, Risler would go into the fields with his brother and the "little one," in search of flowers, of patterns for his wall-papers. Frantz, with his long arms, would pull down the topmost branches of a hawthorn, or would climb a park wall to pick a leaf of graceful shape he had spied on the other side. But they reaped their richest harvests on the banks of the stream.

There they found those flexible plants with long swaying stalks, which make such a lovely effect on hangings, tall, straight reeds, and the volubilis, whose flower, opening suddenly as if in obedience to a caprice, resembles a living face, some one looking at you amid the lovely, quivering foliage. Risler arranged his nosegays artistically, drawing his inspiration from the very nature of the plants, trying to understand thoroughly their manner of life, which cannot be divined after a day of fatigue has passed over them.

Then, when the bouquet was completed, tied with a broad blade of grass as with a ribbon, and

slung over Frantz's back, away they went. Risler, always engrossed in his art, looked about for subjects, for possible combinations, as they walked along.

"Look there, little one — see that bunch of lily of the valley, with its white bells, among those eglantines. What do you think? Wouldn't that be pretty against a sea-green or pearl-gray background?"

But Sidonie cared no more for lilies of the valley than for eglantine. Wild flowers always seemed to her like the flowers of the poor, something after the manner of her lilac dress.

She remembered that she had seen flowers of a different sort at Monsieur Gardinois's, at the Château de Savigny, in the hothouses, on the balconies, and all about the gravelled courtyard lined with tall urns.

Those were the flowers she loved; that was her idea of the country!

The thought of Savigny recurred at every step. When they passed a park gate she would stop and gaze at the smooth, straight road, which probably led to the main entrance. The lawns shaded by the orderly rows of tall trees, the placid terraces at the water's edge, recalled other lawns, other terraces. Those visions of splendor, mingling with her memories, made her Sunday even more melancholy. But it was the return home that was most distressing to her.

The little stations in the outskirts of Paris are so terribly crowded and stifling on those Sunday even-

ings in summer. Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter, such doleful ballads, sung in whispers by voices that no longer have the strength to roar! That was the time when Monsieur Chèbe was in his element.

He would elbow his way to the gate, scold about the delay of the train, declaim against the station-agent, the company, the government; say to Delobelle in a loud voice, so as to be overheard by his neighbors:

"I say — suppose such a thing as this should happen in America!" Which remark, thanks to the expressive by-play of the illustrious actor, and to the superior air with which he replied, "I believe you!" gave those who stood near to understand that these gentlemen knew exactly what would happen in America in such a case. Now, they were equally and entirely ignorant on that subject; but, in the crowd, their words made an impression.

Sitting beside Frantz, with half of his bundle of flowers on her knees, Sidonie would seem to be blotted out, as it were, amid the uproar, during the long wait for the evening trains. From the station, lighted by a single lamp, she could see the black clumps of trees outside, gashed here and there by the last illuminations of the fête, a dark village street, people constantly coming in, and a lantern hanging on a deserted pier.

From timé to time, on the other side of the glass doors, a train would rush by without stopping, with a shower of hot cinders and the roar of

escaping steam. Thereupon a tempest of shouts and stamping would arise in the station, and, soaring above all the rest, the shrill treble of Monsieur Chèbe, shrieking in his sea-gull's voice: "Break down the doors! break down the doors!" — a thing that the little man would have taken good care not to do himself, as he had a craven fear of gendarmes. In a moment the storm would abate. The tired women, their hair disarranged by the wind, would fall asleep on the benches. There were torn and ragged dresses, low-necked white gowns, all covered with dust.

The air they breathed consisted mainly of dust.

It stood upon all their clothes, rose at every step, obscured the light of the lamp, vexed one's eyes, and raised a sort of cloud in front of the tired faces. The cars which they entered at last after hours of waiting were saturated with it also. Sidonie would open the window and look out at the dark fields, an endless line of shadow. Then, like stars without number, the first lanterns of the outer boulevards appeared near the fortifications.

So ended the ghastly day of rest of all those poor creatures. The sight of Paris brought back to each one's mind the thought of the morrow's toil. Dismal as her Sunday had been, Sidonie began to regret that it had passed. She thought of the rich, to whom all the days of their lives were days of rest; and vaguely, as in a dream, the long park avenues of which she had caught glimpses during the day appeared to her thronged with those happy ones of earth, strolling on the

fine gravel, while outside the gate, in the dust of the highroad, the poor man's Sunday hurried swiftly by, having hardly time to pause a moment to look and envy.

Such was little Chèbe's life from thirteen to seventeen.

The years passed but did not bring with them the slightest change. Madame Chèbe's cashmere was a little more threadbare, the little lilac dress had undergone a few additional repairs, and that was all. But, as Sidonie grew older, Frantz, now become a young man, acquired a habit of gazing at her silently with a melting expression, of paying her loving attentions that were visible to everybody, and were unnoticed by none save the girl herself.

Indeed, nothing aroused the interest of little Chèbe.

In the work-room she performed her task regularly, silently, without the slightest thought of the future, or of saving. All that she did seemed to be done as if she were waiting for something.

Frantz, on the other hand, had been working for some time with extraordinary energy, the ardor of those who see something at the end of their efforts; so that, at the age of twenty-four, he graduated second in his class from the École Centrale, with the rank of engineer.

On that evening Risler had taken the Chèbe family to the Gymnase, and throughout the evening he and Madame Chèbe had been making signs and winking at each other behind the chil-

dren's backs. And when they left the theatre Madame Chèbe solemnly placed Sidonie's arm in Frantz's, as if she would say to the lovelorn youth! "Now, straighten matters out — here's your chance."

Thereupon the poor lover tried to straighten matters out.

It is a long walk from the Gymnase to the Marais. After a very few steps the brilliancy of the boulevard is left behind, the sidewalks become darker and darker, the passers more and more rare. Frantz began by talking of the play. He was very fond of comedies of that sort, in which there was plenty of sentiment.

"And you, Sidonie?"

"Oh! as for me, Frantz, you know that as long as there are fine dresses — "

In truth she thought of nothing else at the theatre. She was not one of those sentimental creatures à la Bovary, who return from the play with love phrases ready-made, a conventional ideal. No! the theatre simply made her long madly for luxury and fine raiment; she brought away from it nothing but new methods of arranging the hair, and patterns of dresses. The new, exaggerated toilets of the actresses, their gait, even the spurious elegance of their speech, which seemed to her of the highest distinction, and with it all the tawdry magnificence of the gilding and the lights, the gaudy placard at the door, the long line of carriages, and all the somewhat unhealthy excitement that springs up about a popular play: that

was what she loved, that was what absorbed her thoughts.

"How well they acted their love-scene!" continued the lover.

And, as he uttered that suggestive phrase, he bent fondly toward a little face surrounded by a white woollen hood, from beneath which the hair escaped in rebellious curls.

Sidonie sighed:

"Oh! yes, the love-scene. The actress wore beautiful diamonds."

There was a moment's silence. Poor Frantz had much difficulty in explaining himself. The words he sought would not come, and then too he was afraid. He fixed the time mentally when he would speak:

"When we have passed Porte Saint-Denis — when we have left the boulevard."

But when the time arrived, Sidonie began to talk of such indifferent matters that his declaration froze on his lips, or else it was stopped by a passing carriage, which enabled their elders to overtake them.

At last, in the Marais, he suddenly took courage:

"Listen to me, Sidonie, — I love you."

That night the Delobelles had sat up very late.

It was the habit of those brave-hearted women to make their working day as long as possible, to prolong it so far into the night that their lamp was among the last to be extinguished on quiet Rue de Braque. They always sat up until the great man

returned home, and kept a toothsome little supper warm for him in the ashes on the hearth.

In the days when he was an actor there was some reason for that custom; actors, being obliged to dine early and very sparingly, have a terrible gnawing at their vitals when they go off the stage, and usually eat when they go home. Delobelle had not acted for a long while; but having, as he said, no right to abandon the stage, he kept his mania alive by clinging to a number of the strolling player's habits, and the supper on returning home was one of them, as was his habit of delaying his return until the last footlight in the boulevard theatres was extinguished. To retire without supping, at the hour when everybody else supped, would have been to abdicate, to abandon the struggle, and he would not abandon it, *sacrebleu!*

On the evening in question the actor had not come in and the women were waiting for him, talking as they worked, and with great animation, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. During the whole evening they had done nothing but talk of Frantz, of his success, of the future that lay before him.

"Now," said Mamma Delobelle, "the only thing he needs is to find a good little wife."

That was Désirée's opinion too. That was all that was lacking now to Frantz's happiness, a good little wife, active and brave and used to work, who would forget everything for him. And if Désirée spoke with great assurance, it was because she was very intimately acquainted with

the woman who was so well adapted to Frantz Risler's needs. She was only a year younger than he, just enough to make her younger than her husband and a mother to him at the same time.

Pretty?

No, not exactly, but attractive rather than ugly, notwithstanding her infirmity, for she was lame, poor child! And then she was shrewd and bright, and so loving! No one but Désirée knew how dearly that little woman loved Frantz, and how she had thought of him night and day for years. He had not noticed it himself, but seemed to have eyes for nobody but Sidonie, a *gamine.* But no matter! Silent love is so eloquent, such a mighty power lies hid in restrained feelings. Who knows? Perhaps some day or other —

And the little cripple, leaning over her work, started upon one of those long journeys to the land of chimeras of which she made so many in her invalid's easy-chair, with her feet resting on the motionless stool; one of those wonderful journeys from which she always returned happy and smiling, leaning on Frantz's arm with all the confidence of a beloved wife. As her fingers followed her heart's dream, the little bird she had in her hand at the moment, smoothing his ruffled wings, looked as if he too were of the party and were about to fly far, far away, as joyous and light of heart as she.

Suddenly the door flew open.

"I do not disturb you?" said a triumphant voice.

The mother, who was slightly drowsy, suddenly raised her head.

"Ah! it's Monsieur Frantz. Pray come in, Monsieur Frantz. We're waiting for father, as you see. These brigands of artists always stay out so late! Take a seat — you shall have supper with him."

"Oh! no, thanks," replied Frantz, whose lips were still pale from the emotion he had undergone, "thanks, I can't stop. I saw a light and I just stepped in to tell you — to tell you some great news that will make you very happy, because I know that you love me — "

"Great God, what is it?"

"Monsieur Frantz Risler and Mademoiselle Sidonie are engaged to be married."

"There! did n't I say that all he needed was a good little wife," exclaimed Mamma Delobelle, rising and throwing her arms about his neck.

Désirée had not the strength to utter a word. She bent still lower over her work, and as Frantz's eyes were fixed exclusively upon his happiness, as Mamma Delobelle did nothing but look at the clock to see if her great man would return soon, no one noticed the lame girl's emotion, nor her pallor, nor the convulsive trembling of the little bird that lay in her hands with its head thrown back, like a bird with its death-wound.

IV.

LITTLE CHÈBE'S STORY — THE GLOW-WORMS OF SAVIGNY.

"SAVIGNY-SUR-ORGE.

"MY DEAR SIDONIE, — We were sitting at table yesterday in the great dining-room which you remember, with the door wide open leading to the terrace, where the flowers are all in bloom. I was a little bored. Dear grandpapa had been cross all the morning, and poor mamma dared not say a word, being held in awe by those frowning eyebrows which have always laid down the law for her. I was thinking what a pity it was to be so entirely alone, in the middle of the summer, in such a lovely spot, and that I should be very glad, now that I have left the convent and am destined to pass whole seasons in the country, to have, as in the old days, someone to run about the woods and paths with me.

"To be sure, Georges comes from time to time; but he always arrives very late, just in time for dinner, and is off again with my father in the morning before I am awake. And then he is a serious-minded man now, is Monsieur Georges. He works at the factory, and business cares often bring the wrinkles to his brow.

"I had reached that point in my reflections when suddenly dear grandpapa turns abruptly to me:

"'Whatever has become of your little friend Sidonie? I would be glad to have her here for a time.'

"You can imagine my delight. What happiness to meet again, to renew the pleasant friendship that was broken off by the fault of life rather than by our own! How many things we shall have to tell each other! You, who alone had the knack of driving the wrinkles from my terrible grandfather's brow, will bring us gayety, and I assure you we need it.

"This lovely Savigny is so deserted! Fancy that sometimes in the morning I choose to be a little coquettish. I dress myself, I make myself beautiful with my hair in curls and a pretty gown; I walk through all the paths, and suddenly I realize that I have taken all this trouble for the swans and ducks, my dog Kiss, and the cows who do not even turn to look at me when I pass. Thereupon, in my wrath, I hurry home, put on a stuff dress and busy myself on the farm, in the servants' quarters, everywhere. And on my word! I am beginning to believe that ennui has perfected me, and that I shall make an excellent housekeeper.

"Luckily the hunting season will soon be here and I rely upon that for a little distraction. In the first place, Georges and father, both enthusiastic sportsmen, will come oftener. And then you will be here, you know. For you will reply instantly that you will come, won't you? Monsieur Risler said not long ago that you were not well. The air of Savigny will do you worlds of good.

"Everybody here expects you. And I am dying with impatience.

"CLAIRE."

Her letter written, Claire Fromont donned a great straw hat — for the first days of August were warm and glorious — and went herself to drop it in the little box from which the postman

"She paused a moment to look at the trees by the roadside."

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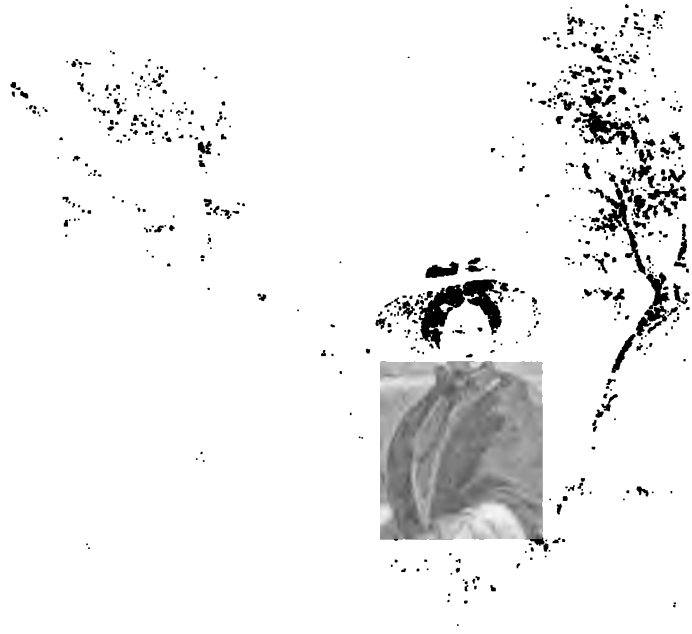

collected the mail from the château every morning as he passed.

It was on the edge of the park, at a turn in the road. She paused a moment to look at the trees by the roadside, at the neighboring meadows sleeping in the bright sunlight. Over yonder the reapers were gathering the last sheaves. Farther on they were ploughing. But all the melancholy of the silent toil had vanished, so far as the girl was concerned, so overjoyed was she at the thought of seeing her friend once more.

No breath came from the high hills on the horizon, no voice from the tree-tops to warn her by a presentiment, to prevent her from sending that fatal letter. And immediately upon her return she gave her attention to the preparation of a pretty bedroom for Sidonie adjoining her own.

The letter did its errand faithfully. From the little green, vine-embowered gate of the château, it found its way to Paris, and arrived that same evening with its Savigny postmark, and impregnated with the odor of the country, at the fifth floor apartment on Rue de Braque.

What an event that was! They read it again and again; and for a whole week, until Sidonie's departure, it lay on the mantel-shelf beside Madame Chèbe's treasures, the clock under a glass globe and the Empire cups. To Sidonie it was like a wonderful romance filled with tales of enchantment and promises, which she read without opening it, simply by gazing at the white envelope

whereon Claire Fromont's monogram was engraved in relief.

Little she thought of marriage now. The important question was, What dress should she wear to the château? She must give her whole mind to that, to cutting and planning, trying on dresses, devising new ways of arranging her hair. — Poor Frantz! How heavy his heart was made by these preparations! That visit to Savigny, which he had tried vainly to oppose, would cause a still further postponement of their wedding, which Sidonie — why, he did not know — persisted in postponing from day to day. He could not go to see her; and when she was once there, in the midst of festivities and pleasures, who could say how long she would remain?

The lover in his despair always went to the Delobelles to confide his sorrows, but he never noticed how quickly Désirée rose as soon as he entered, to make room for him by her side at the work-table, and how she at once sat down again, with cheeks as red as fire and gleaming eyes.

For some days past they had ceased to work at *birds and insects for ornament.* The mother and daughter were hemming pink flounces destined for Sidonie's dress, and the little cripple had never plied her needle with such good heart.

In truth little Désirée was not Delobelle's daughter to no purpose.

She inherited her father's faculty of retaining his illusions, of hoping on to the end and even beyond.

While Frantz was telling his tales of woe, Désirée was thinking that, when Sidonie was gone, he would come every day, if it were only to talk about the absent one; that she would have him there by her side, that they would sit up together waiting for "father," and that, perhaps, some evening, as he sat looking at her, he would discover the difference there is between the woman who loves you and the one who simply allows herself to be loved.

Thereupon the thought that every stitch taken in the dress tended to hasten the departure which she anticipated with such impatience imparted extraordinary activity to her needle, and the unhappy lover ruefully watched the flounces and ruffles perceptibly piling up about her, like little white-capped waves.

When the pink dress was finished, Mademoiselle Chèbe started for Savigny.

Monsieur Gardinois's château was built in the valley of the Orge, on the bank of that capriciously lovely stream, with its windmills, its little islands, its milldams, and its broad greenswards that die at its shores.

The château, an old Louis Quinze structure, low in reality, although made to seem high by the pointed roof, had a most depressing aspect, an aspect suggestive of aristocratic antiquity: broad steps, balconies with rusty balustrades, old urns marred by time, wherein the flowers stood out vividly against the reddish stone. As far as the eye could see, the walls stretched away, decayed and

crumbling, descending gently to the stream. The château overlooked them with its high slated roofs, the farmhouse with its red tiles, and the superb park with its lindens, its ash trees, its poplars, its chestnuts growing confusedly together in a dense black mass, cut here and there by the arched openings of the paths.

But the charm of the old estate was the water, the water which enlivened its silence, which gave character to its beautiful views. There were at Savigny, to say nothing of the river, springs, fountains, ponds, in which the sun sank to rest in all his glory; and they formed a suitable setting for that venerable house, green and mossy as it was, and slightly worn away, like a stone on the edge of a brook.

Unluckily, at Savigny, as in most of those gorgeous Parisian summer palaces, which the parvenus in commerce and speculation have made their prey, the châtelains were not in harmony with the château.

Since he had purchased his château, old Gardinois had done nothing but mar the beauty of the beautiful property chance had placed in his hands, cut down trees "for the view," fill his park with rough obstructions to keep out trespassers, and reserve all his solicitude for a magnificent kitchen garden, which, as it produced fruit and vegetables in abundance, seemed to him more like his own land, the peasant's land.

As for the great salons, where the panels with paintings of famous subjects were fading away in

the autumnal fogs, as for the ponds overrun with water-lilies, the grottoes, the rock-bridges, he cared for them only because of the admiration of visitors, and because of such elements was composed that thing which so flattered his vanity as an ex-dealer in cattle, — a château!

Being already advanced in years, unable to hunt or fish, he passed his time superintending the most trivial details of that extensive property. The grain that was given the hens, the price of the last load of the second crop of hay, the number of bales of straw stored in a magnificent circular granary, furnished him with subjects for scolding for a whole day; and certain it is that, when one contemplated from a distance that lovely estate of Savigny, the château on the hillside, the river flowing at its feet like a mirror, the high terraces darkened by ivy, the supporting wall of the park following the majestic slope of the ground, one would never have suspected the proprietor's niggardliness and meanness of spirit.

In the idleness consequent upon his wealth, Monsieur Gardinois, being sadly bored at Paris, lived at Savigny throughout the year, and the Fromonts kept him company during the summer.

Madame Fromont was a mild, unintelligent woman, whom her father's brutal despotism had early moulded to passive obedience for life. She maintained the same attitude with her husband, whose constant kindness and indulgence had never succeeded in triumphing over that humiliated, taciturn nature, indifferent to everything, and, in some

sense, irresponsible. Having passed her life with no knowledge of business, she had become rich without knowing it and without the slightest desire to take advantage of it. Her fine apartments in Paris, her father's magnificent château, made her uncomfortable. She occupied as small a place as possible in both, filling her life with a single passion, order — a fantastic, abnormal sort of order, which consisted in brushing, wiping, dusting and polishing mirrors, gilding and door-knobs, with her own hand, from morning till night.

When she had nothing to clean, the strange creature would attack her rings, her watch chain, her brooches, scrubbing the cameos and pearls, and by dint of polishing the combination of her own name and her husband's she had effaced all the letters of both. Her fixed idea followed her to Savigny. She picked up the dead wood in the paths, scratched the moss from the benches with the end of her umbrella, and would have liked to dust the leaves and sweep down the old trees; and often, in the train, she looked with envy at the little villas standing in a line along the track, white and clean, with their gleaming utensils, the pewter ball, and the little oblong gardens, which resemble drawers in a commode. Those were her type of country-house.

Monsieur Fromont, who came only occasionally and was always absorbed by his business, enjoyed Savigny little more than she did. Claire alone was really at home in that lovely park. She was familiar with its tiniest shrub. Being obliged to

provide her own entertainment, like all only children, she had become attached to certain walks, watched the flowers bloom, had her favorite path, her favorite tree, her favorite bench for reading. The dinner-bell always surprised her far away in the park. She would come to the table, out of breath but happy, flushed with the fresh air. The shadow of the hornbeams, by dint of stealing over that youthful brow, had imprinted a sort of gentle melancholy there, and the deep dark green of the ponds, crossed by vague beams, was reflected in her eyes.

Those lovely surroundings had in very truth shielded her from the vulgarity, the abjectness of the persons about her. Monsieur Gardinois might deplore in her presence, for hours at a time, the perversity of tradesmen and servants, or make an estimate of what was being stolen from him per month, per week, per day, per minute; Madame Fromont might enumerate her grievances against the mice, the maggots, the dust, the dampness, all desperately bent upon destroying her property, and engaged in a conspiracy against her wardrobes; not a word of their absurd talk remained in Claire's mind. A run around the lawn, an hour's reading on the river-bank restored the tranquillity of that noble and intensely active mind.

Her grandfather looked upon her as a strange creature, altogether out of place in his family. As a child she annoyed him with her great honest eyes, her straightforwardness on all occasions, and

also because he did not find in her a second edition of his own passive and submissive daughter.

"That child will be a proud chit and an original like her father," he would say in his ugly moods.

How much better he liked that little Chèbe girl who used to come now and then and play in the avenues at Savigny! In her at least he detected a nature of the common people like his own, with a sprinkling of ambition and envy, suggested even in those early days by a certain little smile at the corner of the mouth. Moreover, the child exhibited an ingenuous amazement and admiration in presence of his wealth, which flattered his parvenu pride; and sometimes, when he teased her, she would break out with the droll phrases of a Paris *gamin*, phrases redolent of the faubourgs, seasoned by her pretty, piquant face, inclined to pallor, which not even triviality could deprive of its distinction. So the goodman had never forgotten her.

On this occasion above all, when Sidonie arrived at Savigny after her long absence, with her fluffy hair, her graceful figure, her wide-awake, mobile face, the whole heightened by mannerisms smacking somewhat of the shop-girl, she produced a decided effect. Old Gardinois, wondering greatly to see a tall young woman in place of the child he was expecting to see, considered her prettier and, above all, better dressed than Claire.

It was a fact that, when Mademoiselle Chèbe had left the train and was seated in the great calèche from the château, she did not make a bad appearance; but she lacked those things that constituted

her friend's chief beauty and charm — the carriage, the contempt for poses, and, more than all else, the mental tranquillity. Her prettiness was not unlike her dresses, of inexpensive materials, but cut according to the style of the day — rags, if you will, but rags of which fashion, that ridiculous but charming fairy, had regulated the color, the trimming and the shape. Paris has pretty faces made expressly for costumes of that sort, very easy to dress becomingly, for the very reason that they are of no type, and Mademoiselle Sidonie's was one of those faces.

What bliss was hers when the carriage entered the long avenue, bordered with velvety grass and primeval elms, and at the end Savigny awaiting her with its great gate wide open. From that day she led the enchanted life of which she had dreamed so long. Luxury was before her in all its forms, from the magnificent salons, from the high-studded sleeping apartments, from the splendor of the greenhouses and stables, down to those petty details in which everything seems to be condensed, like those exquisite perfumes of which a single drop is sufficient to permeate a whole room, the bunches of flowers strewn over the table-cloth, the dignified bearing of the servants, the doleful and languid "Order the carriage" of Madame Fromont.

And how thoroughly at ease she felt amid all those refinements of wealth! How perfectly that sort of life suited her! It seemed to her that she had never known any other.

Suddenly, in the midst of her intoxication, arrived a letter from Frantz, which brought her back to the realities of her life, to her wretched fate as the future wife of a government clerk, which transported her, whether she would or no, to the mean little apartment they would occupy some day at the top of some dismal house, whose heavy atmosphere, dense with privation, she seemed already to breathe.

Should she break her engagement?

She certainly could do it, as she had given no other pledge than her word. But when he had left her, who could say that she would not wish him back?

In that little brain, turned by ambition, the strangest ideas jostled one another. Sometimes, while grandfather Gardinois, who had laid aside in her honor his old-fashioned hunting jackets and swanskin waistcoats, was jesting with her, amusing himself by contradicting her in order to draw out a sharp retort, she would gaze steadfastly, coldly into his eyes, without replying. Ah! if only he were ten years younger! But the thought of becoming Madame Gardinois did not long occupy her. A new personage, a new hope came into her life.

After Sidonie's arrival, Georges Fromont, who was hardly seen at Savigny except on Sundays, adopted the habit of coming to dinner almost every day.

He was a tall, slender, pale youth, of refined bearing. Having no father or mother, he had

been brought up by his uncle, Monsieur Fromont, and was looked to by him to succeed him in business, and probably to become Claire's husband as well. That ready-made future did not arouse his enthusiasm. In the first place business bored him. As for his cousin, there existed between them the intimate good-fellowship of an education in common, and mutual confidence, but nothing more, at least on his side.

With Sidonie, on the contrary, he was exceedingly embarrassed and shy, and at the same time desirous of producing an effect, — a totally different man, in short. She had just the spurious charm, a little free, which was calculated to attract that coxcombish nature, and it was not long before she discovered the impression that she produced upon him.

When the two girls were walking together in the park, it was always Sidonie who remembered that it was time for the train from Paris. They would go together to the gate to meet the travellers, and Georges's first glance was always for Mademoiselle Chèbe, who remained a little behind her friend, but with the poses and airs that go half-way to meet the eyes. That manœuvring between them lasted some time. They did not mention love, but all the words, all the smiles they exchanged were full of unspoken avowals.

One cloudy and lowering summer evening, when the two friends had left the table as soon as dinner was at an end and were walking in the long tree-lined avenue, Georges joined them. They

were talking upon indifferent subjects, crunching the gravel beneath their lagging footsteps, when Madame Fromont's voice called Claire from the château. Georges and Sidonie were left alone. They continued to walk along the avenue, guided by the uncertain whiteness of the gravel, without speaking or drawing nearer to each other.

A warm wind rustled among the leaves. The ruffled surface of the pond lapped softly against the arches of the little bridge; and the blossoms of the acacias and lindens, detached by the breeze, whirled about in circles, perfuming the electricity-laden air. They felt as if they were surrounded by an atmosphere of storm, vibrant and penetrating. Dazzling flashes of heat passed before their troubled eyes, like those that played along the horizon.

"Oh! what lovely glow-worms!" exclaimed the girl, embarrassed by the oppressive silence broken by so many mysterious sounds.

On the edge of the greensward a blade of grass here and there was illuminated by a tiny green flickering light. She stooped to take one on her glove. He knelt close beside her; and as they leaned down to the level of the grass, their hair and cheeks touching, they gazed at each other for a moment by the light of the glow-worms. How weird and fascinating she seemed to him in that green light, which shone upon her face and died away in the fine network of her waving hair! He had put his arm about her waist, and suddenly, feeling that she abandoned herself to him, he clasped her in a long passionate embrace.

"What are you looking for?" asked Claire, standing in the shadow behind them.

Taken by surprise, with a choking sensation in his throat, Georges trembled so that he could not reply. Sidonie, on the other hand, rose with the utmost calmness, and said as she smoothed her skirt:

"It 's the glow-worms. See how many of them there are to-night. And how they sparkle."

Her eyes also sparkled with extraordinary brilliancy.

"It 's the storm, I suppose," murmured Georges, still trembling.

The storm was close at hand. At brief intervals great clouds of leaves and dust whirled from one end of the avenue to the other. They walked on a few steps, then all three returned to the salon. The young women took their work, Georges tried to read a newspaper, while Madame Fromont polished her rings and Monsieur Gardinois and his son-in-law played billiards in the adjoining room.

How long that evening seemed to Sidonie! She had but one wish, to be alone, alone with her thoughts.

But, in the silence of her little bed-room, when she had blown out the light, which interferes with dreams by casting too bright a light upon the reality, what schemes, what transports of delight! Georges loved her, Georges Fromont, the heir of the factory. They would marry; she would be rich. For, in that mercenary little heart the first kiss of love had awakened no ideas save those of ambition and a life of luxury.

To assure herself that her lover was sincere, she tried to recall the scene under the trees to its most trifling details, the expression of his eyes, the ardor of his embrace, the oaths uttered brokenly, mouth to mouth, in that vaporous light shed by the glow-worms, which one solemn moment had established forever in her heart.

Oh! the glow-worms of Savigny!

All night long they twinkled like stars before her closed eyes. The park was full of them, to the farthest limits of its darkest paths. There were clusters of them all along the lawns, on the trees, in the shrubbery. The fine gravel of the avenues, the waves of the river, emitted green sparks, and all those microscopic flashes formed a sort of holiday illumination in which Savigny seemed to be enveloped in her honor, to celebrate the betrothal of Georges and Sidonie.

When she rose the next day, her plan was formed. Georges loved her; that was certain. Did he think of marrying her? She had a suspicion that he did not, the shrewd minx! But that did not frighten her. She felt strong enough to triumph over that childish nature, at once weak and passionate. She had only to resist him, and that is what she did.

For some days she was cold and indifferent, wilfully blind and devoid of memory. He tried to speak to her, to renew the blissful moment, but she avoided him, always placing someone between them.

Then he wrote.

He carried his letters himself to a hollow in the rock near a clear spring called the "Phantom," which was in the outskirts of the park, sheltered by a thatched roof. Sidonie considered that a charming episode. In the evening she must invent some falsehood, a pretext of some sort for going to the "Phantom" all alone. The shadow of the trees across the path, the awesomeness of the night, the rapid walk, the excitement, made her heart beat deliciously. She would find the letter saturated with dew, with the intense cold of the spring, and so white in the moonlight that she would quickly hide it for fear of being surprised.

And then, when she was alone, what joy to open it, to decipher those magic characters, those words of love which swam before her eyes, surrounded by dazzling blue and yellow circles, as if she were reading her letter in the bright sunlight.

"I love you. Love me"—wrote Georges in every conceivable form.

At first she did not reply; but when she felt that he was fairly caught, wholly in the toils, she declared herself concisely:

"I will love no one but my husband."

Ah! she was a true woman already, was little Chèbe.

V.

HOW LITTLE CHÈBE'S STORY ENDED.

MEANWHILE September arrived.

The hunting season brought together a large, noisy, vulgar party at the château. There were long repasts at which the wealthy bourgeois lingered slothfully and wearily, prone to fall asleep like peasants. They went in carriages to meet the returning hunters in the cool air of the autumn twilight. The mist arose from the fields, from which the crops had been gathered; and while the frightened game skimmed along the stubble with plaintive cries, the darkness seemed to emerge from the forests whose dark masses increased in size, spreading out over the fields.

The calèche lamps were lighted, the hoods raised, and they drove quickly homeward with the fresh air blowing in their faces. The dining-hall, brilliantly illuminated, was filled with gayety and laughter.

Claire Fromont, embarrassed by the vulgarity of those about her, hardly spoke at all. Sidonie shone her brightest. The ride had given animation to her pale complexion and Parisian eyes. She knew how to laugh, understood a little too

much, perhaps, and seemed to the guests the only woman in the party. Her success completed Georges's intoxication; but as his advances became more pronounced, she showed more and more reserve. Thereupon he determined that she should be his wife. He swore it to himself, with the exaggerated emphasis of weak characters, who seem always to combat beforehand the difficulties to which they know that they will yield some day.

It was the happiest moment of little Chèbe's life. Even aside from any ambitious project, her coquettish, false nature found a strange fascination in this love intrigue, mysteriously carried on amid banquets and merrymakings.

No one about them suspected anything. Claire was at that healthy and delightful period of youth when the mind, partly open, clings to the things it knows with blind confidence, in utter ignorance of treachery and falsehood. Monsieur Fromont thought of nothing but his business. His wife cleaned her jewels with frenzied energy. Only old Gardinois and his little gimlet-like eyes were to be feared; but Sidonie entertained him, and even if he had discovered anything, he was not the man to interfere with her future.

Her hour of triumph was at hand, when a sudden, unforeseen disaster blasted her hopes.

One Sunday morning Monsieur Fromont was brought back mortally wounded from a hunting expedition. A bullet intended for a deer had pierced his temple. The château was turned topsy-turvy.

All the hunters, among them the unknown bungler, started in haste for Paris. Claire, wild with grief, entered the room where her father lay on his death-bed, there to remain; and Risler, being advised of the catastrophe, came to take Sidonie home.

On the night before her departure she had a final meeting with Georges at the "Phantom," — a farewell meeting, painful and stealthy, and made solemn by the proximity of death. They swore, however, to love each other always; they agreed upon a method of writing to each other. And they parted.

It was a doleful journey home.

She returned abruptly to her everyday life, escorted by the despairing grief of Risler, to whom his dear master's death was an irreparable loss. On her arrival, she must needs describe her visit to the smallest detail; discuss the inmates of the château, the guests, the parties, the dinners, and the final catastrophe. What torture for her, when, absorbed as she was by a single, never-varying thought, she had so much need of silence and solitude! But there was something even more terrible than that.

On the first day after her return Frantz resumed his former place; and the glances with which he followed her, the words he addressed to her alone, seemed to her unreasonable beyond endurance.

Despite all his shyness and distrust of himself, the poor fellow believed that he had some rights as an accepted and impatient lover, and little

Chèbe was obliged to emerge from her dreams to reply to that creditor, and to postpone once more the maturity of his claim.

There came a day, however, when indecision ceased to be possible.

She had promised to marry Frantz when he had a position; and now he was offered an engineer's berth in the South, at the smelting furnaces of Grand' Combe. That was sufficient for the support of a modest establishment.

There was no way of avoiding the question.

She must either hold to her promise or invent an excuse for breaking it. But what excuse could she invent?

In that pressing emergency, she thought of Désirée. Although the little lame girl had never confided in her, she knew her great love for Frantz. Long ago she had detected it, with her coquette's eyes, bright and changing mirrors, which reflected all the thoughts of others without betraying any of her own. It may be that the thought that another woman loved her betrothed had made Frantz's love more tolerable to her at first; and, just as we place statues on tombstones to make them less sad, Désirée's pretty little pale face at the threshold of that uninviting future had made it seem less forbidding to her.

Now it provided her with a simple and honorable pretext for freeing herself from her promise.

"No! I tell you, mamma," she said to Madame Chèbe one day, "I will never consent to make a friend like her unhappy. I should suffer too much

from remorse, — poor Désirée! Have n't you noticed how badly she looks since I came home; what an imploring way she has of looking at me? No, I won't cause her that sorrow; I won't take away her Frantz."

Even while she admired her daughter's generous spirit, Madame Chèbe looked upon that as rather an exaggerated sacrifice, and remonstrated with her.

"Take care, my child; we ain't rich. A husband like Frantz don't turn up every day."

"Very well! then I won't marry at all," declared Sidonie flatly, and, deeming her pretext an excellent one, she clung persistently to it. Nothing could shake her determination, neither the tears shed by Frantz, who was exasperated by her refusal to fulfil her promise, enveloped as it was in vague reasons which she would not even explain to him, nor the entreaties of Risler, in whose ear Madame Chèbe had mysteriously mumbled her daughter's reasons, and who, in spite of everything could not but admire such a sacrifice.

"Don't accuse her, I tell you! She 's an *anchel!*" he said to his brother, striving to soothe him.

"Ah! yes, she is an angel," assented Madame Chèbe with a sigh, so that the poor betrayed lover had not even the right to complain. Driven to desperation, he determined to leave Paris, and as Grand' Combe seemed too near in his frenzied longing for flight, he asked and obtained an appointment as overseer on the Suez Canal at Ismailia. He went away without knowing or caring to know

aught of Désirée's love; and yet, when he went to bid her farewell, the dear little cripple looked up into his face with her pretty, bashful eyes, in which were plainly written the words:

"I love you, if she does not."

But Frantz Risler did not know how to read what was written in those eyes.

Happily the hearts that are accustomed to suffer have an infinite store of patience. When her friend had gone, the lame girl, with her charming morsel of illusion, inherited from her father and refined by her woman's nature, returned bravely to her work, saying to herself:

"I will wait for him."

And thereafter she spread the wings of her birds to their fullest extent, as if they were all going, one after another, to Ismailia in Egypt. And that was a long distance!

Before sailing from Marseilles, young Risler wrote Sidonie a farewell letter, at once laughable and touching, wherein, mingling the most technical details with the most heartrending adieux, the unhappy engineer declared that he was about to set sail, with a broken heart, on the transport *Sahib*, "a sailing ship and steam ship combined, with engines of fifteen hundred horse power," as if he hoped that so considerable a capacity would make an impression on his ungrateful betrothed, and cause her never-ending remorse. But Sidonie had very different matters in her head.

She was beginning to be disturbed by Georges's silence. Since she left Savigny she had heard

from him once, and that was all. All her letters were left unanswered. To be sure, she knew through Risler that Georges was very busy, and that his uncle's death, devolving the management of the factory upon him as it did, had imposed upon him a responsibility that was beyond his strength. But to leave her without a word!

From the window on the landing, where she had resumed her silent observations, for she had so arranged matters as not to return to Mademoiselle Le Mire, little Chèbe tried to distinguish her lover, watched him as he went back and forth across the yards and among the buildings, and in the afternoon, when it was time for the train to start for Savigny, saw him enter his carriage to go to his aunt and cousin, who were passing the early months of their period of mourning at the grandfather's château in the country.

All this excited and alarmed her; and the proximity of the factory rendered Georges's avoidance of her even more apparent. To think that by raising her voice a little she could make him turn to where she stood! To think that they were separated only by a wall! And yet, at that moment they were very far apart.

Do you remember, little Chèbe, that unhappy winter evening when the excellent Risler rushed into your parents' room with an extraordinary expression of countenance, exclaiming: "Great news!"

Great news, indeed.

Georges Fromont had just informed him that,

in accordance with his uncle's last wishes, he was to marry his cousin Claire, and that, as he was certainly unequal to the task of carrying on the business alone, he had resolved to take him, Risler for a partner, under the firm name of FROMONT JEUNE AND RISLER AÎNÉ.

How did you succeed, little Chèbe, in maintaining your self-possession when you learned that the factory had eluded your grasp and that another woman had taken your place? What a terrible evening! — Madame Chèbe sat by the table mending, Monsieur Chèbe before the fire drying his clothes, which were wet through by his having walked a long distance in the rain. Oh! that wretched room, overflowing with gloom and ennui! The lamp gave a dim light. The evening meal, hastily prepared, had left in the room the odor of the poor man's kitchen. And Risler, drunken with joy, talking with increasing animation and laying plans!

All these things tore your heart, made the treachery still more horrible by the contrast between the riches that eluded your outstretched hand and the ignoble mediocrity in which you were doomed to pass your life.

She was seriously ill and for a long while.

As she lay in bed, whenever the window panes rattled behind the curtains, the unhappy creature fancied that Georges's wedding carriages were driving through the street; and she had paroxysms of nervous excitement, without words and inexplicable, as if a fever of wrath were consuming her.

At last, time and youthful strength, her mother's care, and, more than all, the attentions of Désirée, who now knew of the sacrifice she had made for her, triumphed over the disease. But for a long while Sidonie was very weak, oppressed by a deadly melancholy, by a constant longing to weep, which played havoc with her nervous system.

Sometimes she talked of travelling, of leaving Paris. At other times she insisted that she must enter a convent. Her friends were sorely perplexed and strove to discover the cause of that singular state of mind, which was even more alarming than her illness; when she suddenly confessed to her mother the secret of her melancholy.

She loved the elder Risler. She had never dared to whisper it; but it was he whom she had always loved and not Frantz.

That news was a surprise to everybody, to Risler most of all; but little Chèbe was so pretty, her eyes were so soft when she glanced at him, that the honest fellow instantly became as fond of her as a fool! Indeed it may be that that love had lain in his heart for a long time without his realizing it.

And that is how it happened that, on the evening of her wedding-day, young Madame Risler, in her white wedding-dress, gazed with a smile of triumph at the window on the landing which had been the narrow setting of ten years of her life. That haughty smile, in which there was a touch of profound pity and of scorn as well, such scorn as a parvenu can feel for his poor beginnings, was

evidently addressed to the poor sickly child whom she fancied that she saw up at that window, in the depths of the past and the darkness, and seemed to say to her, pointing to the factory:

"What do you say to this, little Chèbe? I am here now, you see!"

BOOK SECOND.

I.

MY WIFE'S RECEPTION DAY.

NOON. The Marais is breakfasting.

With the booming notes of the *angelus* from Saint-Paul, Saint-Gervais and Saint-Denis du Saint-Sacrament, is mingled the shrill jangle of the factory bells, floating up from the yards. Each of those jangling bells has its own distinctive character. Some are melancholy and some gay, some sprightly and some sluggish. There are rich, happy bells, ringing for hundreds of workmen; there are poor, shrinking bells, which seem to hide behind the others and to make as little noise as possible, as if they feared that bankruptcy might hear them. And then there are the lying, insolent bells, those that ring for the outer world, for the street, to make people think that they belong to large establishments and have many people in their charge.

Thank God, the bell on the Fromont factory is not one of that kind. It is an honest old bell, a little cracked, well-known in the Marais for forty

years past, a bell that has never failed to ring except on holidays and days of *émeutes.*

At its voice a whole colony of workmen files through the gateway of the former mansion-house and vanishes in the neighboring wineshops. The apprentices sit down on the edge of the sidewalk with the masons. To make sure of half an hour for amusement, they breakfast in five minutes on such things as vagrants and paupers eat in Paris, chestnuts, walnuts, and apples, while the masons beside them attack great loaves of bread, white with flour and plaster. The women are in a hurry and run away from the works. They all have, at home or at the shelter, a child to care for or an aged parent, or housekeeping duties to attend to. Suffocated by the air of the workshops, swollen-eyed, their hair made dingy by the dust from the velvet papers, a fine powder which makes one cough, they hurry along, basket on arm, through the crowded street, where the omnibuses make their way with difficulty through the throngs of people.

Sitting near the door, on a stone which once served as a horse-block for equestrians, Risler watches with a smile the exit from the factory. He never loses his enjoyment of the outspoken esteem of all these good people whom he knew when he was insignificant and humble like themselves. The "Good-day, Monsieur Risler," uttered by so many different voices, all in the same affectionate tone, makes his heart warm. The children accost him without fear, the long-bearded designers,

half-workmen, half-artists, shake hands with him as they pass, and address him familiarly as "thou." Perhaps there is a little too much familiarity in all this, for the worthy man has not yet begun to realize the prestige and authority of his new position; and I know someone who considers this free-and-easy manner very humiliating. But that someone cannot see him at this moment, and the master takes advantage of the fact to bestow a hearty greeting upon the old book-keeper, Sigismond, who comes out last of all, erect and red-faced, imprisoned in a high collar, and bareheaded — whatever the weather — for fear of apoplexy.

He and Risler are fellow-countrymen. They have for each other a deep-seated esteem, dating from their first employment at the factory, from the time, long, long ago, when they breakfasted together at the little creamery on the corner, to which Sigismond Planus goes alone now and selects his refreshment for the day from the slate hanging on the wall.

But stand aside! Fromont Jeune's carriage drives through the gateway. He has been out on business all the morning; and the partners as they walk toward the pretty little house in which they both live at the end of the garden, discuss matters of business in a friendly way.

"I have been to Prochasson's," says Fromont. "They showed me some new patterns, pretty ones too, on my word! We must be on our guard. They are dangerous rivals."

But Risler is not at all anxious. He is strong

in his talent, his experience; and then — but this is strictly confidential — he is on the track of a wonderful invention, an improved printing-press, something that — but we shall see. Still talking, they enter the garden, which is as carefully kept as a public park, with round-topped acacias almost as old as the buildings, and magnificent ivies that hide the high, black walls.

Beside Fromont Jeune, Risler Aîné has the appearance of a clerk making his report to his employer. At every step he stops to speak, for his gait is heavy, his mind works slowly, and words have much difficulty in finding their way to his lips. Oh! if he could see the little flushed face up yonder, behind the window on the second floor, watching everything so attentively!

Madame Risler is waiting for her husband to come to breakfast, and waxes impatient over the goodman's moderation. She motions to him with her hand: "Come, come!" But Risler does not notice it. His attention is engrossed by the little Fromont, daughter of Claire and Georges, who is taking a sun-bath, blooming like a flower amid her lace in her nurse's arms. How pretty she is! — "She is your very picture, Madame Chorche."

"Do you think so, my dear Risler? Why everybody says she looks like her father."

"Yes, a little. But —"

And there they all stand, the father and mother, Risler and the nurse, gravely seeking resemblances in that miniature model of a human being, who stares at them out of her little eyes, blinking with

the noise and glare. Sidonie at her open window leans out to see what they are doing, and why her husband does not come up.

At that moment Risler has taken the tiny creature in his arms, the whole fascinating bundle of white clothes and light ribbons, and is trying to make it laugh and crow with baby-talk and gestures worthy of a grandfather. How old he looks, poor man! His tall body, which he contorts for the child's amusement, his hoarse voice, which becomes a low growl when he tries to soften it, are shameful and ridiculous.

Up above, the wife taps the floor with her foot and mutters between her teeth:

"The idiot!"

At last, weary of waiting, she sends a servant to tell monsieur that breakfast is served; but the game is so far advanced that monsieur does not see how he can go away, how he can interrupt those explosions of laughter and little bird-like cries. He succeeds at last, however, in giving the child back to its nurse, and escapes into the hall, laughing with all his heart. He is laughing still when he enters the dining-room; but a glance from his wife stops him short.

Sidonie is seated at table before the chafing-dish, already filled. Her martyr-like attitude suggests a determination to be ugly.

"Oh! there you are. It's very lucky!"

Risler took his seat, a little ashamed.

"What would you have, my love? That child is so —"

"I have asked you before not to speak to me in that way. It is n't good form between us."

"What, not when we 're alone?"

"Bah! you will never learn to adapt yourself to our new fortune. And what's the result? No one in this place treats me with any respect. Père Achille hardly touches his hat to me when I pass his lodge. To be sure, I 'm not a Fromont, and I have n't a carriage."

"Come, come, little one, you know perfectly well that you can use Madame Chorche's coupé. She always puts it at our disposal."

"How many times must I tell you that I don't choose to be under any obligations to that woman?"

"Oh! Sidonie —"

"Oh! yes, I know, it 's all understood. Madame Fromont is the good Lord himself. Everyone is forbidden to touch her. And I must make up my mind to be a nobody in my own house, to allow myself to be humiliated, trampled under foot."

"Come, come, little one —"

Poor Risler tries to interpose, to say a word in favor of his dear Madame Chorche. But he has no tact. That is the worst possible method of effecting a reconciliation; and Sidonie at once bursts forth:

"I tell you that that woman, with all her calm airs, is proud and spiteful. In the first place, she detests me, I know that. So long as I was poor little Sidonie and she could toss me her broken dolls and old dresses, it was all right; but now

that I am my own mistress as well as she, it vexes her and humiliates her. Madame gives me advice with a lofty air, and criticises my ways. I did wrong to have a maid. Of course! Was n't I in the habit of waiting on myself? She never loses a chance to wound me. When I call on her on Wednesdays, you ought to hear the tone in which she asks me, right before everybody, how 'dear Madame Chèbe' is. — Oh! yes. I 'm a Chèbe and she 's a Fromont. One 's as good as the other, in my opinion. My grandfather was a druggist. What was hers? A peasant who got rich by money-lending. Oh! I 'll tell her so one of these days, if she shows me too much of her pride; and I 'll tell her too that their little brat, although they don't suspect it, looks just like that old Père Gardinois, and God knows he is n't handsome."

"Oh!" exclaims Risler, unable to find words to reply to her.

"Oh! yes, *pardi!* I advise you to admire their child. She 's always sick. She cries all night like a little cat. It keeps me awake. And afterward, through the day, I have mamma's piano and her scales — tra la la la. If it was only music worth listening to!"

Risler has taken the wisest course. He does not say a word until he sees that she is beginning to calm down a little, when he completes the soothing process with compliments.

"How pretty we are to-day! Are we going out soon to make some calls, eh?"

He resorts to this mode of address to avoid the more familiar form, which is so offensive to her.

"No, I am not going to make calls," Sidonie replies with a certain pride. "On the other hand, I expect to receive them. This is my day."

In response to her husband's astounded, bewildered expression, she continues:

"Why, yes, this is my day. Madame Fromont has one; I can have one also, I fancy."

"Of course, of course," said honest Risler, looking about with some little uneasiness. "So that's why I saw so many flowers everywhere, on the landing, in the salon."

"Yes, my maid went down to the garden this morning. Did I do wrong? Oh! you don't say so, but I'm sure you think I did wrong. *Dame!* I thought the flowers in the garden belonged to us as much as to them."

"Certainly they do — but you — it would have been better perhaps —"

"To ask leave? That's it — to humble myself again for a few paltry chrysanthemums and two or three bits of green. Besides, I didn't make any secret of taking the flowers; and when she comes up a little later —"

"Is she coming? Ah! that's very nice of her."

Sidonie turned upon him indignantly.

"What's that? Nice of her? Upon my word, if she don't come, that would be the last straw. When I go every Wednesday to be bored to death in her salon with a crowd of affected, simpering women."

She did not say that those same Wednesdays of Madame Fromont's were of great service to her, that they were like a weekly journal of fashions, one of those composite little publications in which you are told how to enter and leave a room, how to bow, how to place flowers in a jardinière, and cigars in a case, to say nothing of the engravings, the procession of graceful, faultlessly attired men and women, and the names of the best dressmakers. Nor did Sidonie say that she had entreated all those friends of Claire's, of whom she spoke so scornfully, to come and see her on her day, and that the day was selected by them.

Will they come? Will Madame Fromont Jeune insult Madame Risler Aîné, by absenting herself on her first Friday? The thought makes her almost feverish with anxiety.

"For heaven's sake, hurry," she says again and again. "Good God! how long you are at your breakfast!"

It is a fact that it is one of honest Risler's whims to eat slowly and to light his pipe at the table while he sips his coffee. To-day he must renounce these cherished habits, must leave the pipe in its case because of the smoke, and, as soon as he has swallowed the last mouthful, run hastily and dress, for his wife insists that he must come up during the afternoon and pay his respects to the ladies.

What a sensation in the factory when they see Risler Aîné come in, on a week-day, in a black frock-coat and dress cravat!

"Are you going to a wedding, pray?" cries Sigismond, the cashier, from behind his grating.

And Risler, not without a feeling of pride, replies:

"It is my wife's reception day!"

Soon everybody in the place knows that it is Sidonie's day; and Père Achille, who takes care of the garden, is not very well pleased to find that the branches of the winter laurels by the gate are broken.

Before taking his seat at the table upon which he draws, in the bright light from the high windows, Risler has taken off his fine frock coat, which embarrasses him, and has turned up his clean shirt sleeves; but the idea that his wife is expecting company preoccupies and disturbs him; and from time to time he puts on his coat and goes up to her.

"Has no one come?" he asks timidly.

"No, monsieur, no one."

In the beautiful red salon — for they have a salon in red damask, with a console between the windows and a pretty table in the centre of the light-flowered carpet — Sidonie has established herself in the attitude of a woman holding a reception, a circle of chairs of all sorts around her. Here and there are books, reviews, a little work-basket in the shape of a game-bag, with silk tassels, a bunch of violets in a glass vase, and green plants in the jardinières. Everything is arranged exactly as in the Fromonts' apartments on the floor below; but the taste, that invisible line which separates the distinguished

from the vulgar, is not yet refined. You would say it was a passable copy of a pretty *genre* picture. The hostess's dress, even, is too new; she looks more as if she were making a call than as if she were at home. In Risler's eyes everything is superb, beyond reproach; he is preparing to say as much as he enters the salon, but, in face of his wife's wrathful glance, he checks himself in terror.

"You see, it's four o'clock," she says, pointing to the clock with an angry gesture. "No one will come. But I take it especially ill of Claire not to come up. She's at home — I am sure of it — I can hear her."

Indeed, ever since noon, Sidonie has listened intently to the slightest sounds on the floor below, the child's crying, the closing of doors. Risler attempts to go down again in order to avoid a renewal of the conversation at breakfast; but his wife will not have it so. The very least he can do is to stay with her when everybody else abandons her, and so he remains there, at a loss what to say, rooted to the spot, like those people who dare not move during a storm for fear of attracting the lightning. Sidonie moves excitedly about, going in and out of the salon, changing the position of a chair, changing it back again, looking at herself as she passes the mirror, and ringing for her maid to send her to ask Père Achille if no one has inquired for her. That Père Achille is such a spiteful creature! Perhaps when people have come, he has said that she was out.

But no, the concierge has not seen anyone.

Silence and consternation. Sidonie is standing at the window on the left, Risler at the one on the right. From there they can see the little garden, where the darkness is gathering, and the black smoke which the chimney emits beneath the low-hanging clouds. Sigismond's window is the first to show a light on the ground floor; the cashier trims his lamp himself with painstaking care, and his tall shadow passes in front of the flame and bends double behind the grating. Sidonie's wrath is diverted a moment by these familiar details.

Suddenly a small coupé drives into the garden and stops in front of the door. At last some one is coming. In that pretty whirl of silk and flowers and jet and flounces and furs, as it runs quickly up the step, Sidonie has recognized one of the most fashionable frequenters of the Fromont salon, the wife of a wealthy dealer in bronzes. What an honor to receive a call from such an one! Quick, quick! the family takes its position, Monsieur in front of the hearth, Madame in an easy-chair, carelessly turning the leaves of a magazine. Wasted pose! The fair caller did not come to see Sidonie; she has stopped at the floor below.

Ah! if Madame Georges could hear what her neighbor says of her and her friends!

At that moment the door opens and "Mademoiselle Planus" is announced.

She is the cashier's sister, a poor old maid, humble and modest, who has made it her duty to make this call upon the wife of her brother's employer, and who seems stupefied by the warm..

welcome she receives. She is surrounded and made much of. "How kind of you to come! Draw up to the fire." They overwhelm her with attentions and show great interest in her slightest word. Honest Risler's smiles are as warm as his thanks. Sidonie herself displays all her fascinations, overjoyed to exhibit herself in her glory to one who was her equal in the old days, and to reflect that the other, in the room below, must hear that she has had callers. So she makes as much noise as possible, moving chairs, pushing the table around; and when the old maid takes her leave, dazzled, enchanted, bewildered, she escorts her to the landing with a great rustling of flounces, and calls to her in a very loud voice, leaning over the rail, that she is at home every Friday. "You understand, every Friday."

Now it is dark. The two great lamps in the salon are lighted. In the adjoining room they hear the servant laying the table. It is all over. Madame Fromont Jeune will not come.

Sidonie is livid with rage.

"Just fancy, that minx can't come up eighteen stairs! No doubt Madame thinks we're not big enough for her. Ah! but I'll have my revenge."

As she pours forth her wrath in unjust words, her voice becomes coarse, takes on the intonations of the faubourg, an accent of the common people which betrays the ex-apprentice of Mademoiselle Le Mire.

Risler is unlucky enough to make a remark:

"Who knows? Perhaps the child is sick."

She turns upon him in a fury, as if she would like to bite him.

"Will you hold your tongue about that child? After all, it 's your fault that this has happened to me. You don't know how to make people treat me with respect."

And as she violently closed the door of her bedroom, making the globes on the lamps tremble as well as all the knick-knacks on the étagères, Risler, left alone, stands motionless in the centre of the salon, looking with an air of consternation at his white wrist-bands, his broad patent-leathers, and mutters mechanically:

"My wife's day!"

II.

THE TRUE PEARL AND THE FALSE PEARL.

"WHAT can be the matter? What have I done to her?" Claire Fromont often wondered when she thought of Sidonie.

She was entirely ignorant of what had formerly taken place between her friend and Georges, at Savigny. Her life was so upright, her mind so pure, that it was impossible for her to divine the jealous, mean-spirited ambition that had grown up by her side within the past fifteen years. And yet the enigmatical expression in that pretty face as it smiled upon her gave her a vague feeling of uneasiness which she could not understand. An affectation of politeness, strange enough between friends, was suddenly succeeded by an ill-dissembled wrath, a cold, stinging tone, in presence of which Claire was as perplexed as by a knotty problem. Sometimes, too, a singular presentiment, the ill-defined intuition of a great calamity, was mingled with her uneasiness; for all women have more or less second sight, and, even in the most innocent, utter ignorance of evil is suddenly illumined by visions of extraordinary lucidity.

From time to time, as the result of a conversation somewhat more prolonged than usual, or of one of those unexpected meetings when faces taken by surprise allow their real thoughts to be seen, Madame Fromont reflected seriously concerning this strange little Sidonie; but the active, urgent duties of life, with its accompaniment of affections and preoccupations, left her no time for dwelling upon such trifles.

There is, with all women, a time of life when they encounter such sudden windings in the road that their whole horizon changes and all their points of view become transformed.

As a young girl, the falling away of that friendship bit by bit, as if torn from her by an unkindly hand, would have been a source of great regret to her. But she had lost her father, the object of her greatest, her only youthful affection; then she had married. The child had come with its thrice welcome demands upon her every moment. Moreover, she had with her her mother, almost in her dotage, still stupefied by her husband's tragic death. In a life so fully occupied, Sidonie's caprices received but little attention; and it had hardly occurred to Claire Fromont to be surprised at her marriage to Risler. He was clearly too old for her; but, after all, what difference did it make, if they loved each other?

As for being vexed because little Chèbe had attained that lofty position, had become almost her equal, her very superior nature was incapable of such pettiness. On the contrary, she would have

been glad with all her heart to know that that young wife, whose home was so near her own, who lived the same life, so to speak, and had been her playmate in childhood, was happy and highly-esteemed. Being most kindly disposed toward her, she tried to teach her, to instruct her in the ways of society, as one might instruct an attractive provincial, who fell but little short of being charming.

Advice is not readily accepted by one pretty young woman from another. When Madame Fromont, on the occasion of a grand dinner-party, took Madame Risler to her bedroom, and said to her, smiling frankly in order not to anger her: "Too many jewels, my dear. And then, you know, with a high dress one does n't wear flowers in one's hair," — Sidonie blushed, and thanked her friend, but wrote down an additional grievance against her in the bottom of her heart.

In Claire's circle her welcome was decidedly cold.

Faubourg Saint-Germain has its pretensions; but do not imagine that the Marais has none!

Those wives and daughters of mechanics, of wealthy manufacturers, knew little Chèbe's story; indeed they would have guessed it simply by her manner of making her appearance and by her demeanor among them.

Sidonie's efforts were unavailing. She retained the manners of a shop-girl. Her slightly artificial amiability, sometimes too humble, was as unpleasant as the spurious elegance of the shop; and her

disdainful attitudes recalled the superb airs of the *head saleswomen* in the great dry goods establishments, arrayed in black silk dresses, which they take off in the dressing-room when they go away at night,—who stare with an imposing air, from the vantage-point of their mountains of curls, at the poor creatures who venture to haggle over prices.

She felt that she was being examined and criticised, and her modesty was compelled to place itself upon a war footing. Of the names mentioned in her presence, the amusements, the parties, the books of which they talked to her, she knew nothing. Claire did her best to help her, to keep her on the surface, with a friendly hand always outstretched; but many of these ladies considered Sidonie pretty; that was enough to make them bear her a grudge for seeking admission to their circle. Others, proud of their husbands' positions, of their wealth, could not invent enough unspoken affronts and patronizing phrases to humiliate the little parvenu.

Sidonie included them all in a single phrase: "Claire's friends, that is to say, my enemies!" But she was seriously incensed against but one.

The two partners had no suspicion of what was taking place between their wives.

Risler, constantly engrossed in his *press*, sometimes remained at his draughting-table until midnight. Fromont passed his days abroad, lunched at his club, was almost never at the factory. He had his reasons for that.

Sidonie's proximity disturbed him. His capricious passion for her, that passion that he had sacrificed to his uncle's last wishes, recurred too often to his memory with all the regret one feels for the irreparable; and, conscious that he was weak, he fled. His was a pliable nature, without sustaining purpose, intelligent enough to appreciate its failings, too weak to guide itself. On the evening of Risler's wedding — he had been married but a few months himself — he had experienced anew, in that woman's presence, all the emotion of the stormy evenings at Savigny. Thereafter, without self-examination, he avoided seeing her again or speaking with her. Unfortunately, as they lived in the same house, as their wives saw each other ten times a day, chance sometimes brought them together; and this strange thing happened, — that that husband, wishing to remain virtuous, deserted his home altogether and sought distraction elsewhere.

Claire was not astonished that it was so. She had become accustomed during her father's lifetime to the constant "up and away" of a business life; and during her husband's absences, zealously performing her duties as wife and mother, she invented long tasks, occupations of all sorts, walks for the child, prolonged, peaceful tarryings in the sunlight, from which she would return home, overjoyed with the little one's progress, deeply impressed with the gleeful enjoyment of all infants in the fresh air, and with a touch of their radiance in the depths of her serious eyes.

Sidonie also went out a great deal. It often happened, toward night, that Georges's carriage, driving through the gateway, would compel Madame Risler to step hastily aside as she was returning in a gorgeous costume from a triumphal promenade. The boulevard, the shop-windows, the purchases, made after long deliberation as if to enjoy to the full the pleasure of purchasing, detained her very late. They would exchange a bow, a cold glance at the foot of the staircase; and Georges would hurry into his apartments, as into a place of refuge, concealing beneath a flood of caresses, bestowed upon the child his wife held out to him, the sudden emotion that had seized him.

Sidonie, for her part, seemed to have forgotten everything, and to have retained no other feeling than contempt for that weak, cowardly creature. Moreover, she had many other things to think about.

Her husband had just had a piano placed in her red salon, between the windows.

After long hesitation she had decided to learn to sing, thinking that it was rather late to begin to play the piano; and twice a week, Madame Dobson, a pretty, sentimental blonde, came to give her lessons from twelve o'clock to one. In the silence of the neighborhood the *a — a — a* and *o — o — o*, persistently prolonged, repeated again and again, with the windows open, gave the factory the atmosphere of a boarding-school.

And it was in very truth a school-girl who was

practising those exercises, an inexperienced, wavering little soul, full of unconfessed longings, with everything to learn and to find out in order to become a real woman. But her ambition confined itself to a superficial aspect of things.

"Claire Fromont plays the piano, I will sing. She is considered a refined and distinguished woman, and I propose that people shall say the same of me."

Without a thought of perfecting her education, she passed her life running about among the milliners and dressmakers. "What are people going to wear this winter?" She was attracted by the gorgeous displays in the shop windows, by everything that caught the eye of the passers-by.

There still remained, at the ends of her fingers, a trace of the false pearls she had handled so long, a touch of their artificial polish, their hollow fragility, their superficial brilliancy. Indeed she was herself a false pearl, well-rounded, brilliant, handsomely set, by which the common herd might be deceived; but Claire Fromont was a genuine pearl, whose lustre was at once rich and refined, and when they were together the difference was perceptible. One realized that Claire had always been a pearl, a tiny pearl in her childhood, enhanced as she grew to womanhood by those elements of refinement and distinction which had made of her a rare and priceless creature. The other, on the contrary, was clearly the handiwork of Paris, that maker of false jewels who dispenses thousands of trifles, brilliant and charming to the

eye, but unsubstantial, ill assorted and badly made: a typical product of the petty trades among which she had grown up.

The one thing that Sidonie envied Claire more than all else was the child, the luxurious plaything, beribboned from the curtains of its cradle to its nurse's cap. She did not think of the sweet maternal duties, demanding patience and self-abnegation, of the long rockings when sleep would not come, of the laughing awakenings sparkling with fresh water. No! she saw in the child naught but the daily walk. It was such a pretty sight, the little bundle of finery, with floating ribbons and long feathers, that follows young mothers through the crowded streets.

When she wanted company she had only her parents or her husband. She preferred to go out alone. The excellent Risler had such an absurd way of showing his love for her, playing with her as if she were a doll, pinching her chin and her cheek, capering about her, crying: "Hou! hou!" or staring at her with his great soft eyes like an affectionate and grateful dog. That senseless love, which made of her a toy, a mantel ornament, made her ashamed. As for her parents, they were an embarrassment to her in presence of the people she wished to know, and immediately after her marriage she almost disburdened herself of them by hiring a little house for them at Montrouge. That step had cut short the frequent invasions of Monsieur Chèbe and his long frock coat, and the endless visits of good Madame Chèbe, in whom the

return of comfortable circumstances had revived former habits of gossip and of indolence.

Sidonie would have been very glad to rid herself of the Delobelles in the same way, for their proximity annoyed her. But the Marais was a central location for the old actor, because the boulevard theatres were so near; then too, Désirée, like all sedentary persons, clung to the familiar outlook, and her gloomy courtyard, dark at four o'clock in winter, seemed to her like a friend, like a familiar face which the sun lighted up at times as if it were smiling at her. As she was unable to get rid of them, Sidonie had adopted the course of ceasing to visit them.

In truth her life would have been lonely and depressing enough, had it not been for the distractions which Claire Fromont procured for her. Each time added fuel to her wrath. She would say to herself:

"Must everything come to me through her?"

And when, just at dinner-time, a box at the theatre or an invitation for the evening was sent to her from the floor below, while she was dressing, overjoyed at the opportunity to exhibit herself, she thought of nothing but crushing her rival. But such opportunities became more rare as Claire's time was more and more engrossed by her child. When grandfather Gardinois came to Paris, however, he never failed to bring the two families together. The old peasant's gayety, for its freer expansion, needed little Sidonie, who did not take fright at his jests. He would take them

all four to dine at Philippe's, his favorite restaurant, where he knew all the habitués, the waiters and the steward, would spend a lot of money, and then take them to a box, secured beforehand, at the Opéra-Comique or the Palais-Royal.

At the theatre he laughed uproariously, talked familiarly with the box-openers, as he did with the waiters at Philippe's, loudly demanded foot-stools for the ladies, and when the performance was done insisted on having the top-coats and fur wraps of his party first of all, as if he were the only three-million parvenu in the audience.

For these more or less vulgar entertainments, from which her husband usually excused himself, Claire with her usual tact dressed very quietly and attracted no notice. Sidonie, on the contrary, with all sail set, in full view of the boxes, laughed with all her heart at the grandfather's anecdotes, happy to have descended from the second or third gallery, her usual location in the old days, to that lovely proscenium box, adorned with mirrors, with a velvet rail that seemed made expressly for her light gloves, her ivory opera-glass and her spangled fan. The tawdry splendor of the theatre, the red and gold of the hangings, were genuine splendor to her. She bloomed among them like a pretty paper flower in a filigree jardinière.

One evening, at the performance of a successful play at the Palais-Royal, among all the noted women who were present, painted celebrities wearing microscopic hats and armed with immense

fans, their rouge-besmeared faces standing out from the shadow of the boxes in the gaudy setting of their gowns, Sidonie's behavior, her toilet, the peculiarities of her laugh and her expression attracted much notice. All the opera-glasses in the hall, guided by the magnetic current that is so powerful under the great chandeliers, were turned one by one upon the box in which she sat. Claire soon became embarrassed, and modestly insisted upon changing places with her husband, who, unluckily, had accompanied them that evening.

Georges, youthful and elegant, sitting beside Sidonie, seemed her natural companion, while Risler Aîné, always so placid and self-effacing, seemed in his proper place beside Claire Fromont, who in her dark clothes suggested the respectable woman *incog.* at the Bal de l'Opéra.

Upon leaving the theatre each of the partners offered his arm to his neighbor. A box-opener, speaking to Sidonie, referred to Georges as "your husband," and the little woman beamed with pleasure.

"Your husband!"

That simple phrase was enough to upset her and set in motion a multitude of evil currents in the depths of her heart. As they passed through the corridors and the foyer, she watched Risler and Madame "Chorche" walking in front of them. Claire's refinement of manner seemed to her to be vulgarized, annihilated by Risler's shuffling gait. "How ugly he must make me look when we are

walking together!" she said to herself. And her heart beat fast as she thought what a charming, happy, admired couple they would have made, she and this Georges Fromont, whose arm was trembling beneath her own.

Thereupon, when the blue-lined coupé drove up to the door of the theatre, she began to reflect, for the first time, that, when all was said, that woman had stolen her place and that she would be justified in trying to recover it.

III.

THE BREWERY ON RUE BLONDEL.

AFTER his marriage Risler had given up the brewery. Sidonie would have been glad to have him leave the house in the evening for a fashionable club, a resort of wealthy, well-dressed men; but the idea of his returning, amid clouds of pipe-smoke, to his friends of earlier days, Sigismond, Delobelle and her own father, humiliated her and made her unhappy. So he ceased to frequent the place; and that was something of a sacrifice. It was almost a glimpse of his native country, that brewery situated in an out-of-the-way corner of Paris. The infrequent carriages, the high, barred windows of the ground floors, the odor of fresh drugs, of pharmaceutical preparations, imparted to that narrow little Rue Blondel a vague resemblance to certain streets in Bâle or Zurich. The brewery was managed by a Swiss and crowded with men of that nationality. When the door was opened, through the smoke-laden atmosphere, dense with the accents of the North, one had a vision of a vast low room with hams hanging from the rafters, casks of beer standing in a row, the floor ankle-deep with saw-dust, and on the counter great salad-bowls filled with potatoes as red as chestnuts and baskets

of pretzels fresh from the oven, their golden knots sprinkled with white salt.

For twenty years Risler had had his pipe there, a long pipe marked with his name in the rack reserved for the regular customers, and his table, at which he was always joined by several discreet, taciturn compatriots, who listened admiringly, but without comprehending them, to the interminable harangues of Chèbe and Delobelle. When Risler ceased his visits to the brewery, the two last-named worthies likewise turned their backs upon it, for several excellent reasons. In the first place, Monsieur Chèbe now lived a considerable distance away. Thanks to the generosity of his children, the dream of his whole life was realized at last.

"When I am rich," the little man used to say in his cheerless rooms in the Marais, "I will have a house of my own, at the gates of Paris, almost in the country, a little garden which I will plant and water myself. That will be better for my health than all the excitement of the capital."

Well, he had his house now, and he did not enjoy himself in it, I give you my word.

It was at Montrouge, on the road around the city. "A small châlet with garden," said the advertisement, printed on a placard which gave an almost exact idea of the dimensions of the property. The papers were new and of rustic design, the paint perfectly fresh; a water-butt planted beside a vine-clad arbor played the part of a pond. In addition to all these advantages, only a hedge separated this paradise from another "châlet with

garden" of precisely the same description, occupied by Sigismond Planus the cashier and his sister. To Madame Chèbe that was a most precious circumstance. When the good woman was bored, she would take a stock of knitting and darning and go and sit in the old maid's arbor, dazzling her with the tale of her past splendors. Unluckily, her husband had not the same source of distraction.

However, everything went well at first. It was midsummer, and Monsieur Chèbe, always in his shirt-sleeves, was busily employed in getting settled. Each nail to be driven in the house was the subject of leisurely reflections, of endless discussions. It was the same with the garden. He had determined at first to make an English garden of it, lawns always green, winding paths shaded by shrubbery. But the devil of it was that it took so long for the shrubbery to grow.

"Faith! I have a good mind to make an orchard of it," said the impatient little man.

And thenceforth he dreamed of nothing but vegetables, long lines of beans, and peach-trees against the wall. He dug for whole mornings, knitting his brow in a preoccupied way and wiping his forehead ostentatiously before his wife, so that she would say:

"For heaven's sake, do rest a bit — you 're killing yourself."

The result was that the garden was a mixture, flowers and fruit, park and kitchen garden; and whenever he went into Paris Monsieur Chèbe was

careful to decorate his button-hole with a rose from his rose-bushes.

While the fine weather lasted, the good people did not weary of admiring the sunsets behind the fortifications, the long days, the bracing country air. Sometimes, in the evening, when the windows were open, they sang duets; and in presence of the stars in heaven, which began to twinkle simultaneously with the lanterns on the railway around the city, Ferdinand would become poetical. — But when the rain came and he could not go out, what misery! Madame Chèbe, a dyed-in-the-wool Parisian, sighed for the narrow streets of the Marais, her expeditions to the market of Blancs-Manteaux, and to the shops of the quarter.

As she sat by the window, her usual station for sewing and observation, she would look out at the damp little garden, where the volubilis and the nasturtiums, stripped of their blossoms, were dropping away from the lattices with an air of exhaustion, at the long straight line of the grassy slope of the fortifications, still fresh and green, and, a little farther on, at the corner of a street, the office of the Paris omnibuses, with all the points on their route inscribed in enticing letters on the green walls. Whenever one of the omnibuses lumbered away on its journey, she followed it with her eye, as a government clerk at Cayenne or Nouméa gazes after the packet returning to France; she made the trip with it, knew just where it would stop, at what point it would lurch around a corner, grazing the shop-windows with its wheels.

As a prisoner, Monsieur Chèbe became a terrible trial. He could not work in the garden. On Sundays the fortifications were deserted; he could no longer strut about among the working men's families dining on the grass, and pass from group to group in a neighborly way, his feet encased in embroidered slippers, with the authoritative bearing of a wealthy landowner of the vicinity. That he missed more than anything else, consumed as he was by the desire to make people think about him. So that, having nothing to do, having no one to pose before, no one to listen to his schemes, his stories, the anecdote of the accident to the Duc d'Orléans — a similar accident had happened to him in his youth, you remember — the unfortunate Ferdinand overwhelmed his wife with reproaches.

"Your daughter banishes us — your daughter is ashamed of us — "

She heard nothing but that: "Your daughter — your daughter — your daughter — " For, in his anger with Sidonie, he denied her, throwing upon his wife the whole responsibility for that monstrous and unnatural child. It was a genuine relief for poor Madame Chèbe when her husband took an omnibus at the office to go and hunt up Delobelle — whose hours for lounging were always at his disposal — and pour into his bosom all his rancor against his son-in-law and his daughter.

The illustrious Delobelle also bore Risler a grudge, and freely said of him: "He is a dastard."

The great man had hoped to form an integral

part of the new household, to be the organizer of festivities, the *arbiter elegantiarum*. Instead of which, Sidonie received him very coldly, and Risler no longer took him to the brewery even. However, the actor did not complain too loud, and whenever he met his friend he overwhelmed him with attentions and flattery; for he had need of him.

Weary of awaiting the discerning manager, seeing that the engagement he had longed for so many years did not come, it had occurred to Delobelle to purchase a theatre and manage it himself. He counted upon Risler for the funds. Opportunely enough there happened to be a small theatre on the boulevard for sale, as a result of the failure of its manager. Delobelle mentioned it to Risler, at first very vaguely, in a wholly hypothetical form: "There would be a good chance to make a turn." Risler listened with his usual phlegm, saying: "Indeed, it would be a good thing for you." And to a more direct suggestion, not daring to answer "No," he took refuge behind such phrases as "I will see" — "Later on" — "I don't say no," — and finally uttered the unlucky words: "I must see the estimates."

For a whole week the actor had delved away at plans and figures, seated between his wife and daughter, who watched him in admiration and intoxicated themselves with this latest dream. The people in the house said: "Monsieur Delobelle is going to buy a theatre." On the boulevard, in the actors' cafés, nothing was talked of but this

transaction. Delobelle did not conceal the fact that he had found someone to advance the funds; the result being that he was surrounded by a crowd of unemployed actors, old comrades who tapped him familiarly on the shoulder and recalled themselves to his recollection. "You know, old boy." He promised engagements, breakfasted at the café, wrote letters there, saluted those who entered with the tips of his fingers, held very animated colloquies in corners; and already two threadbare authors had read to him a drama in seven tableaux, which was "exactly what he wanted" for his opening piece. He talked about "my theatre!" and his letters were addressed: "Monsieur Delobelle, Manager."

When he had composed his prospectus and made his estimates, he went to the factory to see Risler, who, being very busy, made an appointment with him on Rue Blondel; and that same evening, Delobelle, being the first to arrive at the brewery, established himself at their old table, ordered a pitcher of beer and two glasses, and waited. He waited a long while, with his eye on the door, trembling with impatience. Whenever anyone entered, the actor turned his head. He had spread his papers on the table, and pretended to be reading them, with animated gestures, movements of the head and lips.

It was a magnificent opportunity, unique in its way. He already fancied himself acting — for that was the main point — acting, in a theatre of his own, parts written expressly for him, to suit his

talents, in which he would produce all the effect of—

Suddenly the door opened, and Monsieur Chèbe made his appearance amid the pipe-smoke. He was as surprised and annoyed to find Delobelle there as Delobelle himself was by his coming. He had written to his son-in-law that morning that he wished to speak with him on a matter of very serious importance, and that he would meet him at the brewery. It was an affair of honor, entirely between themselves, from man to man. The real fact concerning this affair of honor was that Monsieur Chèbe had given notice of his intention to leave the little house at Montrouge, and had hired a shop with an entresol on Rue du Mail, in the midst of a business district. A shop? Bless my soul, yes. And now he was a little alarmed regarding his hasty step, anxious to know how his son-in-law would take it, especially as the shop cost much more than the Montrouge house, and there were some considerable repairs to be made at the outset. As he had long been acquainted with his son-in-law's kindness of heart, Monsieur Chèbe had determined to appeal to him at once, hoping to lead him into his game and to throw upon him the responsibility for this domestic *coup d'état.* Instead of Risler he found Delobelle.

They looked askance at each other, with an unfriendly eye, like two dogs meeting beside the same porringer. Each divined whom the other was awaiting, and they did not try to deceive each other.

"Is n't my son-in-law here?" asked Monsieur Chèbe, eying the documents spread over the table, and emphasizing the words "my son-in-law," to indicate that Risler belonged to him and to nobody else.

"I am waiting for him," Delobelle replied, gathering up his papers.

He pressed his lips together, as he added with a dignified, mysterious, but always theatrical air:

"It is a matter of very great importance."

"So is mine," declared Monsieur Chèbe, his three hairs standing erect like a porcupine's quills.

As he spoke he took his seat on the bench beside Delobelle, ordered a pitcher and two glasses as he had done, then sat erect with his hands in his pockets and his back against the wall, waiting in his turn. The two empty glasses in front of them, intended for the same absentee, seemed to be hurling defiance at each other.

And Risler did not come.

The two men, drinking in silence, lost their patience and fidgeted about on the bench, each hoping that the other would tire of waiting.

At last their ill-humor overflowed, and naturally poor Risler received the whole flood.

"What an outrage to keep a man of my years waiting so long!" began Monsieur Chèbe, who never mentioned his great age except upon such occasions.

"I believe, on my word, that he is making sport of us," replied Monsieur Delobelle.

And the other:

"No doubt monsieur had company to dinner."

"And such company!" scornfully exclaimed the illustrious actor, in whose mind bitter memories were awakened.

"The fact is —" continued Monsieur Chèbe.

They drew closer to each other and talked. The hearts of both were full in respect to Sidonie and Risler. They opened the flood-gates. That Risler, with all his good-nature, was an egotist pure and simple, a parvenu. They laughed at his accent and his bearing, they mimicked certain of his peculiarities. Then they talked about his housekeeping, and, lowering their voices, they became confidential, laughed familiarly together, were friends once more.

Monsieur Chèbe went very far: "Let him beware! he has been foolish enough to send the father and mother away from their child; if anything happens to her, he can't blame us. A girl who has n't her parents' example before her eyes, you understand —"

"Certainly — certainly," said Delobelle; "especially as Sidonie has become a great flirt. However, what can you expect? He will get no more than he deserves. No man of his age ought to — Hush! there he is!"

Risler had entered the room, and was walking toward them, distributing hand-shakes all along the benches.

There was a moment of embarrassment between the three friends. Risler excused himself as well as he could. He had been detained at home;

Sidonie had company, — Delobelle touched Monsieur Chèbe's foot under the table — and, as he spoke, the poor man, decidedly perplexed by the two empty glasses that awaited him, wondered in front of which of the two he ought to take his seat.

Delobelle was generous.

"You have business together, messieurs, do not let me disturb you."

He added in an undertone, winking at Risler:

"I have the papers."

"The papers?" echoed the other, in a bewildered tone.

"The estimates," whispered the actor.

Thereupon, with a great show of discretion, he withdrew within himself and resumed the reading of his documents, his head in his hands and his fingers in his ears.

The two others conversed by his side, first in undertones, then louder, for Monsieur Chèbe's shrill, piercing voice could not long restrain itself. — He was n't old enough to be buried, deuce take it! — He would have died of ennui at Montrouge. — What he must have was the bustle and activity of Rue du Mail or Rue du Sentier, — of the business districts.

"Yes, but a shop? Why a shop?" Risler timidly ventured to ask.

"Why a shop? — why a shop?" repeated Monsieur Chèbe, red as an Easter egg, and raising his voice to the highest pitch in its register. "Why, because I 'm a merchant, Monsieur Risler, a merchant and son of a merchant. Oh! I see what

you're coming at. I have no business. But whose fault is it? If the people who shut me up at Montrouge, at the gates of Bicêtre, like a paralytic, had had the good sense to furnish me with the money to start in business—" At that point Risler succeeded in silencing him, and thereafter only snatches of the conversation could be heard: —"a more convenient shop—high-studded —better air—future plans—enormous business —I will speak when the time comes—Many people will be astonished."—As he caught these fragments of sentences, Delobelle became more and more absorbed in his estimates, presenting the eloquent back of the man who is not listening. Risler, sorely perplexed, drank a swallow of beer from time to time to keep himself in countenance. At last, when Monsieur Chèbe had grown calm, and with good reason, his son-in-law turned with a smile to the illustrious Delobelle, and met the stern, impassive glance which seemed to say: "Well! what of me?"

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*—that is true," thought the poor fellow.

Changing at once his chair and glass, he took his seat opposite the actor. But Monsieur Chèbe had not Delobelle's courtesy. Instead of discreetly moving away, he took his glass and joined the others, so that the great man, unwilling to speak before him, solemnly replaced his papers in his pocket a second time, saying to Risler:

"We will talk this over later."

Very much later, in truth, for Monsieur Chèbe had reflected:

"My son-in-law is so good-natured. If I leave him with this swindler, who knows what he may get out of him?"

And he remained to watch. The actor was furious. It was impossible to postpone the matter to some other day, for Risler told them that he was going the next day to pass a month at Savigny.

"A month at Savigny!" exclaimed Monsieur Chèbe, incensed at the thought of his son-in-law escaping him. "How about business?"

"Oh! I shall come to Paris every day with Georges. Monsieur Gardinois was very anxious to see his little Sidonie."

Monsieur Chèbe shook his head. He considered it very imprudent. Business is business. A man ought to be on the spot, always on the spot, in the breach. Who could say? the factory might take fire in the night. And he repeated sententiously: "The eye of the master, my dear fellow, the eye of the master," while the actor — who was little better pleased by this intended departure — opened his great eyes, giving them an expression at once cunning and authoritative, the veritable expression of the eye of the master.

At last, about midnight, the last Montrouge omnibus bore away the tyrannical father-in-law, and Delobelle was able to speak.

"In the first place, the prospectus," he said, preferring not to attack the question of figures at

once; and with his eye-glasses on his nose, he began, in a declamatory tone, always upon the stage: "When one considers coolly the degree of decrepitude which dramatic art has reached in France, when one measures the distance that separates the stage of Molière —" There were several pages like that. Risler listened, puffing at his pipe, afraid to stir, for the reader looked at him every moment over his eye-glasses, to watch the effect of his phrases. Unfortunately, right in the middle of the prospectus, the café closed. The lights were extinguished; they must go. — And the estimates? — It was agreed that they should read them as they walked along. They stopped at every gaslight. The actor displayed his figures. So much for the hall, so much for lighting, so much for poor rates, so much for the actors. — On that question of the actors, he was firm.

"The best point about the affair," he said, "is that we shall have no leading man to pay. Our leading man will be Bibi." (When Delobelle mentioned himself, he commonly called himself Bibi.) "A leading man is paid twenty thousand francs — as we have none to pay, it 's just as if you put twenty thousand francs in your pocket. Tell me, is n't that true?"

Risler did not reply. He had the constrained manner, the wandering eyes of the man whose thoughts are elsewhere. The reading of the estimates being concluded, Delobelle, dismayed to find that they were drawing near the corner of Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, put the question

squarely. Would he advance the money, yes or no?

"Well!—no," said Risler, inspired by an heroic courage which he owed principally to the proximity of the factory and to the thought that the welfare of his family was at stake.

Delobelle was dumfounded. He had believed that the business was as good as done, and he stared at his companion, intensely agitated, his eyes as big as saucers, and rolling his papers in his hand.

"No," Risler continued, "I can't do what you ask, for this reason."

Thereupon the worthy man, slowly, with his usual heaviness of speech, explained that he was not rich. Although a partner in a wealthy house, he had no available funds. Georges and he drew a certain sum from the concern every month; then, when they struck a balance at the end of the year, they divided the profits. It had cost him a good deal to begin housekeeping: all his savings. It was still four months before the inventory. Where was he to obtain the 30,000 francs to be paid down at once for the theatre? And then, beyond all that, the affair could not be successful.

"Why, it must succeed.—Bibi will be there!" As he spoke, poor Bibi drew himself up to his full height; but Risler was determined, and all Bibi's arguments met the same refusal: "Later, in two or three years, I don't say something may not be done."

The actor fought for a long time, yielding his

ground inch by inch. He proposed revising his estimates. The thing might be done cheaper. "It would still be too dear for me," Risler interrupted. "My name does n't belong to me. It is a part of the firm. I have no right to pledge it. Imagine my going into bankruptcy!" His voice trembled as he uttered the word.

"But if everything is in my name," said Delobelle, who had no superstition. He tried everything, invoked the sacred interests of art, went so far as to mention the pretty little actresses whose alluring glances — Risler laughed aloud.

"Come, come, you rascal! What 's that you 're saying? You forget that we 're both married men, and that it 's very late and our wives are expecting us. — No ill-will, eh? — This is not a refusal, you understand. — By the way, come and see me after the inventory. We will talk it over again. Ah! there 's Père Achille putting out his gas. — I must go in. Good-night."

It was after one o'clock when the actor returned home.

The two women were waiting for him, working as usual, but with a sort of feverish activity which was strange to them. Every moment the great scissors that Mamma Delobelle used to cut the brass wire were seized with strange fits of trembling, and Désirée's little fingers, as she mounted an insect, moved so fast that it gave one the vertigo to watch them. Even the long feathers of the little birds strewn about on the table before her seemed, so to speak, more brilliant, more richly colored than

on other days. It was because a lovely visitor named Hope had called upon them that evening. She had made the tremendous effort required to climb five dark flights of stairs, and had opened the door of the little room to cast a luminous glance therein. However much you may have been deceived in life, those magic gleams always dazzle you.

"Oh! if your father might only succeed!" said Mamma Delobelle from time to time, as if to sum up a whole world of happy thoughts to which her reverie abandoned itself.

"He will succeed, mamma, never fear. Monsieur Risler is so kind, I will answer for him. And Sidonie is very fond of us, too, although since she was married she does seem to neglect her old friends a little. But we must make allowance for the difference in our positions. Besides, I never shall forget what she did for me."

And at the thought of what Sidonie had done for her, the little cripple applied herself with even more feverish energy to her work. Her electrified fingers moved with redoubled swiftness. You would have said that they were running after some fleeing, elusive thing, like happiness for example, or the love of someone who loves you not.

"What was it that she did for you?" her mother would naturally have asked her; but at that moment she was but slightly interested in what her daughter said. She was thinking exclusively of her great man.

"No! do you think so, my dear? Just suppose

your father should have a theatre of his own and act again as he used to! You don't remember; you were too small then. But he had a tremendous success, no end of recalls. One night, at Alençon, the subscribers to the theatre gave him a gold wreath. Ah! he was a brilliant man in those days, so light-hearted, so glad to be alive. Those who see him now don't know him, poor man, misfortune has changed him so. Oh well! I feel sure that all that's necessary is a little success to make him young and happy again. And then there's money to be made managing theatres. The manager at Nantes had a carriage. Can you imagine us with a carriage? Can you imagine it, I say? That's what would be good for you. You could go out, leave your armchair once in a while. Your father would take us into the country. You would see the water and the trees you have had such a longing to see."

"Oh! the trees," murmured the pale little recluse, trembling from head to foot.

At that moment the street door of the house was violently closed, and Monsieur Delobelle's measured step echoed in the vestibule. There was a moment of speechless, breathless anguish. The women dared not look at each other, and mamma's great scissors trembled so that they cut the wire crooked.

The poor devil had unquestionably received a terrible blow. His illusions crushed, the humiliation of a refusal, the jests of his comrades, the bill at the café where he had breakfasted on credit

during the while period of his managership, a bill which must be paid — all these things occurred to him in the silence and gloom of the five flights he had to climb. His heart was torn. Even so, the actor's nature was so strong in him that he deemed it his duty to envelop his distress, genuine as it was, in a conventional tragic mask.

As he entered, he paused, cast an ominous glance around the work-room, at the table covered with work, his little supper waiting for him in a corner, and the two dear anxious faces looking up at him with glistening eyes. He stood a full minute without speaking, — and you know how long a minute's silence seems on the stage; then he took three steps forward, sank upon a low chair beside the table and exclaimed in a hissing voice:

"Ah! I am accursed!"

At the same time he dealt the table such a terrible blow with his fist that the *birds and insects for ornament* flew to the four corners of the room. His terrified wife rose and timidly approached him, while Désirée half rose in her armchair with an expression of nervous agony that distorted all her features.

Lolling on his chair, his arms hanging despondently by his sides, his head on his chest, the actor soliloquized. A fragmentary soliloquy, interrupted by sighs and dramatic hiccoughs, overflowing with imprecations against the pitiless, selfish bourgeois, those monsters to whom the artist gives his flesh and blood for food and drink.

Then he reviewed his whole theatrical life, his

early triumphs, the golden wreath from the subscribers at Alençon, his marriage to this "sainted woman," and he pointed to the poor creature who stood by his side, with tears streaming from her eyes, and trembling lips, nodding her head dotingly at every word her husband said.

In very truth, a person who had never heard of the illustrious Delobelle could have told his history in detail after that long monologue. He recalled his arrival in Paris, his humiliations, his privations. Alas! he was not the one who had known privation. One had but to look at his full, rotund face beside the thin drawn faces of the two women. But the actor did not look so closely.

"Oh!" he said, continuing to intoxicate himself with declamatory phrases, "oh! to have struggled so long. For ten years, fifteen years have I struggled on, supported by these devoted creatures, fed by them."

"Papa, papa, hush," cried Désirée, clasping her hands.

"Yes, fed by them, I say — and I do not blush for it. For I accept all this devotion in the name of sacred art. But this is too much. Too much has been put upon me. I renounce the stage."

"Oh! my dear, what's that you say?" cried Mamma Delobelle, rushing to his side.

"No, leave me. I have reached the end of my strength. They have slain the artist in me. It is all over. I renounce the stage."

If you had seen the two women throw their arms about him then, implore him to struggle on, prove

to him that he had no right to give up, you could not have restrained your tears. But Delobelle resisted.

He yielded at last, however, and promised to continue the fight a little while, since it was their wish; but it required many an entreaty and caress to carry the point.

A quarter of an hour later, the great man, famished by his monologue, relieved by having given vent to his despair, was seated at one end of the table, supping with excellent appetite, feeling no other ill effect than a trifling weariness, like an actor who has played a very long and very dramatic part during the evening.

In such cases, the actor who has stirred the emotions of a whole audience and wept genuine tears on the stage, throws it all aside when he has left the theatre. He leaves his emotion in his dressing-room with his costume and his wigs, whereas, the more ingenuous, more keenly impressed spectators return home with red eyes and oppressed hearts, and the extraordinary tension of their nerves keeps them awake a long while.

Little Désirée and Mamma Delobelle did not sleep much that night!

IV.

AT SAVIGNY.

IT was a great misfortune, that sojourn of the two families at Savigny for a month.

After an interval of two years Georges and Sidonie found themselves side by side once more on the old estate, too old not to be always like itself, where the stones, the ponds, the trees, always the same, seemed to cast derision upon all that changes and passes away. A renewal of intercourse under such circumstances must have been disastrous to two natures that were not of a very different stamp, and far more virtuous than those two.

As for Claire, she had never been so happy; Savigny had never seemed so lovely to her. What joy to walk with her child over the greensward where she herself had walked as a child, to sit, a young mother, upon the shaded seats from which her own mother had looked on at her childish games years before; to go, leaning on Georges's arm, to seek out the nooks where they had played together. She felt a tranquil contentment, the overflowing happiness of placid lives which enjoy their bliss in silence; and all day long her *peignoirs* swept along the paths, guided by the tiny foot-

steps of the child, her cries and her demands upon her mother's care.

Sidonie seldom took part in these maternal promenades. She said that the chatter of children tired her, and therein she agreed with old Gardinois, who seized upon any pretext to annoy his granddaughter. He believed that he accomplished that object by devoting himself exclusively to Sidonie, and arranging even more entertainments for her than on her former visit. The carriages that had been buried in the carriage-house for two years, and were dusted once a week because the spiders spun their webs on the silk cushions, were placed at her disposal. The horses were harnessed three times a day, and the gate was continually turning on its hinges. Everybody in the house followed this impulse of worldliness. The gardener paid more attention to his flowers because Madame Risler selected the finest ones to wear in her hair at dinner. And then there were calls to be made. Luncheon parties were given, parties at which Madame Fromont Jeune presided, but at which Sidonie, with her sprightly manners, shone supreme. Indeed Claire often left her a clear field. The child had its hours for sleeping and riding out, with which no amusements could interfere. The mother was compelled to remain away, and it often happened that she was unable to go with Sidonie to meet the partners when they came from Paris at night.

"You will make my excuses," she would say, as she went up to her room.

Madame Risler was triumphant. A picture of elegant indolence, she would drive away behind the galloping horses, unconscious of the swiftness of their pace, without a thought in her mind.

The fresh breeze blowing through her veil alone gave her a semblance of life. A tavern seen vaguely through her drooping eyelids at the corner of a road, poorly dressed children playing on the grass between the ruts, reminded her of her Sunday walks with Risler and her parents, and the little shudder that passed over her at the memory made her the more comfortable in her cool, gracefully draped gown, in the rocking motion of the calèche which lulled her mind to sleep, happy and reassured.

Other carriages were always waiting at the station. Two or three times she heard someone near her whisper: "That is Madame Fromont Jeune;" and indeed, it was a simple matter for people to make the mistake, seeing the three return together from the station, Sidonie sitting beside Georges on the back seat, laughing and talking with him, and Risler facing them, smiling contentedly with his broad hands spread flat upon his knees, but evidently feeling a little out of place in that fine carriage. The thought that she was taken for Madame Fromont made her very proud, and she became a little more accustomed to it every day. On their arrival at the château, the two families separated until dinner; but, in the presence of his wife sitting tranquilly beside the sleeping child, Georges Fromont, too young to be

absorbed, by the joys of domesticity, was constantly thinking of the brilliant Sidonie, whose voice he could hear pouring forth triumphant roulades under the trees in the garden.

While the whole château was thus transformed in obedience to the whims of a young woman, old Gardinois continued to lead the narrow life of a discontented, idle, impotent parvenu. The most successful means of distraction he had discovered was espionage. The goings and comings of his servants, the remarks that were made about him in the kitchen, the basket of fruit and vegetables brought every morning from the kitchen-garden to the pantry, were subjects of continual investigation. He knew no greater pleasure than to find somebody at fault. It occupied his mind, gave him a measure of importance, and at dinner, while his guests listened in silence, he would at great length describe the misdemeanor, the stratagem to which he had resorted to detect it, the culprit's manner, his terror and his entreaties.

For the purposes of this constant spying upon his household, the goodman made use of a stone bench set in the gravel behind an enormous paulownia. He would sit there whole days at a time, neither reading nor thinking, simply watching to see who went in or out. For the night he had invented something different. In the great vestibule at the main entrance, which opened upon the stoop with its array of bright flowers, he had caused an opening to be made leading to his bedroom on the floor above. An acoustic tube of an

improved type was supposed to convey to his ears every sound on the ground floor, even to the conversation of the servants taking the air on the stoop.

Unluckily, the instrument was so perfect that it exaggerated all the noises, confused them and prolonged them, and the incessant, regular ticking of a great clock, the cries of a parroquet kept in one of the lower rooms, the clucking of a hen in search of a lost kernel of corn, were all Monsieur Gardinois could hear when he applied his ear to the tube. As for voices, they reached him in the form of a confused buzzing, like the muttering of a crowd, in which it was impossible to distinguish anything. He had nothing to show for the expense of the apparatus, and he concealed his wonderful tube in a fold of his bed curtains.

One night the goodman, who had fallen asleep, was awakened suddenly by the creaking of a door. It was an extraordinary thing at that hour. The whole household was asleep. Nothing could be heard save the footsteps of the watchdogs on the sand, or their scratching at the foot of a tree in which an owl was screeching. An excellent opportunity to use his listening tube. Upon putting it to his ear Monsieur Gardinois was assured that he had made no mistake. The sounds continued. One door was opened, then another. The bolt of the front door was thrown back with an effort. But neither Pyramus nor Thisbe, not even Kiss, the formidable Newfoundland, had made a sign. He rose softly to see who those strange burglars could

be, who were leaving the house instead of entering it; and this is what he saw through the slats of his blind:

A tall, slender young man, with Georges's figure and carriage, arm-in-arm with a woman in a lace hood. They stopped first at the bench by the paulownia, which was in full flower.

It was a superb, snow-white night. The moon, brushing the tree-tops, made numberless flakes of light amid the dense foliage. The terraces, white with moonbeams, where the Newfoundlands in their curly coats went to and fro, watching the night butterflies, the smooth, deep waters of the ponds, all shone with a mute, calm brilliance, as if reflected in a silver mirror. Here and there glow-worms twinkled on the edges of the greensward.

The two promenaders remained for a moment beneath the shade of the paulownia, sitting silent on the bench, lost in the dense darkness which the moon makes where its rays do not reach. Suddenly they appeared in the bright light, wrapped in a languishing embrace, walked slowly across the main avenue, and passed from sight among the trees.

"I was sure of it," said old Gardinois, recognizing them. Indeed, what need had he to recognize them? Did not the silence of the dogs, the aspect of the sleeping house, tell him more clearly than anything else could, what species of impudent crime, unknown and unpunished, haunted the avenues in his park by night? Be that as it may, the old peasant was overjoyed by his discovery. He

"The two promenaders remained for a moment beneath the shade of the paulownia."

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Goupil & Cie Paris.

returned to bed without a light, chuckling to himself, and in the little cabinet filled with hunting implements, from which he had watched them, thinking at first that he had to do with burglars, the moon's rays shone upon naught save the fowling-pieces hanging on the wall and the boxes of cartridges of all sizes.

They had taken up the thread of their love at the corner of the same avenue. The year that had passed, marked by hesitation, by vague struggles, by fruitless resistance, seemed to have been only a preparation for their meeting. And it must be said that, when once the fatal step was taken, they were surprised at nothing so much as that they had postponed it so long. Georges Fromont especially was seized by a mad passion. He was false to his wife, his best friend; he was false to Risler, his partner, the faithful companion of his every hour.

It was a constant renewal, a sort of overflow of remorse, wherein his passion was intensified by the magnitude of his sin. Sidonie became his one engrossing thought, and he discovered that until then he had not lived. As for her, her love was made up of vanity and spite. The thing that she relished above all else was Claire's degradation in her eyes. Ah! if she could only have said to her: "Your husband loves me, — he is false to you with me," her pleasure would have been even greater. As for Risler, in her view he richly deserved what had happened to him. In her old apprentice's jargon, in which she still thought, even if she did

not speak it, the poor man was only "an old fool," whom she had taken as a stepping-stone to fortune. "An old fool" is made to be deceived!

During the day Savigny belonged to Claire, to the child who ran about upon the gravel, laughing at the birds and the clouds, and who grew apace. The mother and child had for their own the daylight, the paths filled with sunbeams. But the blue nights were given over to adultery, to that sin firmly installed in the château, which talked in undertones, crept noiselessly behind the closed blinds, and in face of which the sleeping house became dumb and blind, and resumed its stony impassibility, as if it were ashamed to see and hear.

V.

SIGISMOND PLANUS TREMBLES FOR HIS CASH-BOX.

"A CARRIAGE, my dear Chorche? — I — have a carriage? What for?"

"I assure you, my dear Risler, that it's quite essential for you. Our business, our relations are extending every day; the coupé is no longer enough for us. Besides, it does n't look well to see one of the partners always in his carriage and the other on foot. Believe me, it 's a necessary outlay, and of course it will go into the general expenses of the firm. Come, resign yourself to the inevitable."

It was genuine resignation.

It seemed to Risler as if he were stealing something in taking the money for such an unheard-of luxury as a carriage; however, he ended by yielding to Georges's persistent representations, thinking as he did so:

"This will make Sidonie very happy!"

The poor fellow had no suspicion that Sidonie herself, a month before, had selected at Binder's the coupé which Georges insisted upon giving her, and which was to be charged to expense account in order not to alarm the husband.

Honest Risler was so plainly created to be de-

ceived. His inborn uprightness, the implicit confidence in men and things which was the foundation of his transparent nature had been intensified of late by preoccupation resulting from his pursuit of the *Risler Press*, an invention destined to revolutionize the wall-paper industry, and representing in his eyes his contribution to the partnership assets. When he laid aside his drawings and left his little workroom on the first floor, his face invariably wore the absorbed look of the man who has his life on one side, his anxieties on another. What a delight it was to him, therefore, to find his home always tranquil, his wife always in good humor, becomingly dressed and smiling. Without undertaking to explain the change to himself, he recognized that for some time past the "little one" had not been as before in her treatment of him. She allowed him to resume his old habits: the pipe at dessert, the little nap after dinner, the appointments at the brewery with Chèbe and Delobelle. Their apartments also were transformed, embellished. From the simple expedients of jardinières filled with flowers and a bright red salon, Sidonie progressed to the latest caprices of fashion, the rage for antique furniture and rare porcelain. The hangings of her bedroom were of a delicate blue silk, with a long nap like the inside of a jewel casket. A grand piano by a famous maker made its appearance in the salon in place of the old one, and Madame Dobson, the singing teacher, came no longer twice a week, but every day, music-roll in hand.

Of a curious type was that young woman of American extraction, with hair of an acid blond, like lemon-pulp, over a bold forehead and metallic blue eyes. As her husband would not allow her to go on the stage, she gave lessons, and sang in some bourgeois salons. As a result of living in the artificial world of compositions for voice and piano, she had contracted a species of sentimental frenzy.

She was romance itself. In her mouth the words "love" and "passion" seemed to have eighty syllables, she uttered them with so much expression. Oh! expression. That was what Mistress Dobson placed before everything, and what she tried, and tried in vain, to impart to her pupil.

"*Ay Chiquita*," upon which Paris fed for several seasons, was then at the height of its popularity. Sidonie studied it conscientiously, and all the morning she could be heard singing:

> "*On dit que tu te maries,*
> *Tu sais que j'en puis mourir.*"[1]

"Mouri-i-i-i-i-r!" the expressive Madame Dobson would interpose, while her hands wandered feebly over the piano-keys; and die she would, raising her light-blue eyes to the ceiling and wildly throwing back her head. Sidonie could never accomplish it. Her mischievous eyes, her lips, swollen with fulness of life, were not made for

[1] They say that thou 'rt to marry,
Thou know'st that I may die.

such Æolian harp sentimentalities. The refrains of Offenbach or Hervé, interspersed with unexpected notes, in which one resorts to expressive gestures for aid, to a motion of the head or the body, would have suited her better; but she dared not admit it to her languorous instructress. By the way, although she had been made to sing a great deal at Mademoiselle Le Mire's, her voice was still fresh and not unpleasing.

Having no social connections, she came gradually to make a friend of her singing-mistress. She would keep her to breakfast, take her to drive in the new coupé and to assist in her purchases of dresses and jewels. Madame Dobson's sentimental and sympathetic tone led one to repose confidence in her. Her constant repinings seemed to long to attract other repinings. Sidonie told her of Georges, of their relations, attempting to palliate her offence by blaming the cruelty of her parents in marrying her by force to a rich man much older than herself. Madame Dobson at once showed a disposition to assist them; not that the little woman was venal, but she had a passion for passion, a taste for romantic intrigue. As she was unhappy in her own home, married to a dentist who beat her, all husbands were monsters in her eyes, and poor Risler especially seemed to her a horrible tyrant whom his wife was quite justified in hating and deceiving.

She was an active confidant and a very useful one. Two or three times a week she would bring tickets for a box at the Opéra or the Italiens, or

some one of the little theatres which enjoy a temporary vogue, and cause all Paris to go from one end of Paris to the other for a season. In Risler's eyes the tickets came from Madame Dobson; she had as many as she chose to the theatres where operas were given. The poor wretch had no suspicion that one of those boxes for an important "first night" had often cost his partner ten or fifteen louis. It was really too easy to deceive such a husband as that. His inexhaustible credulity quietly accepted every falsehood; moreover, he knew nothing of that fictitious society in which his wife was already beginning to be known. He never accompanied her. On the few occasions, soon after their marriage, when he had escorted her to the theatre, he had fallen asleep, to his shame, being too simple-minded to care about the audience and too slow of comprehension to be interested in the play. So that he was infinitely obliged to Madame Dobson for taking his place with Sidonie. She did it with such good grace!

In the evening, when his wife went away, always splendidly attired, he would gaze admiringly at her, having no suspicion of the cost of her dresses, certainly none of the man who paid for them, and would await her return at his table by the fire, busy with his drawing, free from care, and happy to be able to say to himself: "What a good time she is having!"

On the floor below, at the Fromonts', the same comedy was being played, but with a transposi-

tion of parts. There it was the young wife who sat by the fire. Every evening, half an hour after Sidonie's departure, the great gate swung open to give passage to the Fromont coupé conveying monsieur to his club. What would you have? Business has its exigencies. All the great deals are arranged at the club, around the *bouillotte* table, and a man must go there or suffer the penalty of seeing his business fall off. Claire innocently believed it all. When her husband had gone, she felt depressed for a moment. She would have liked so much to keep him with her or to go out leaning on his arm, to seek enjoyment with him. But the sight of the child cooing in front of the fire and kicking her little pink feet while she was being undressed, speedily soothed the mother. Then the eloquent word "business," the merchant's reason of state, was always at hand to help her to resign herself.

Georges and Sidonie met at the theatre. Their feeling at first when they were together was one of satisfied vanity. People stared at them a great deal. She was really pretty now, and her irregular but attractive features, which required the aid of all the eccentricities of the prevailing style in order to produce their full effect, adapted themselves to them so perfectly that you would have said they were invented expressly for her. In a few moments they went away and Madame Dobson was left alone in the box. They had hired a small suite on Avenue Gabriel, near the *rond-point* of the Champs Élysées — the dream of the young women

at the Le Mire establishment — two luxuriously furnished, quiet rooms, where the silence of the wealthy quarter, disturbed only by passing carriages, formed a blissful envelope for their love. Little by little, when she had become accustomed to her sin, she conceived the most audacious whims. From her old working days she had retained in the depths of her memory the names of public balls, of famous restaurants where she was eager to go now, just as she took pleasure in causing the doors to be thrown open for her at the establishments of the great dressmakers, whose signs only she had known in her earlier days. For what she sought above all else in this liaison was revenge for the sorrows and humiliations of her youth. Nothing delighted her so much, for example, when returning from an evening drive in the Bois, as a supper at the Café Anglais with the sounds of luxurious vice about her. From these repeated excursions she brought back peculiarities of speech and behavior, equivocal refrains and a style of dress that imported into the bourgeois atmosphere of the old commercial house an accurate reproduction of the most advanced type of the Paris-Cocotte of that period.

At the factory they began to suspect something. The women of the people, even the poorest, are so quick at picking a dress to pieces! When Madame Risler went out, about three o'clock, fifty pairs of sharp, envious eyes, lying in ambush at the windows of the polishing-shop, watched her pass, penetrating to the lowest depths of her guilty

conscience through her black velvet dolman and her cuirass of sparkling jet.

Although she did not suspect it, all the secrets of that mad brain were flying about her like the ribbons that played upon her bare neck; and her daintily shod feet, in their bronzed boots with ten buttons, told the story of all sorts of clandestine expeditions, of the carpeted stairways they ascended at night on their way to supper, and the warm fur robes in which they were wrapped when the coupé made the circuit of the lake in the darkness dotted with lanterns.

The workwomen laughed sneeringly and whispered: "Just look at that Tata Bébelle! There 's a way to dress to go out. She don't rig herself up like that to go to mass, that 's sure! To think that it ain't three years since she used to start for the shop every morning in an old waterproof, and two sous' worth of roasted chestnuts in her pockets to keep her fingers warm. Now she rides in her carriage." And amid the talc dust and the roaring of the stoves, red-hot in winter and summer alike, more than one poor girl reflected on the caprice of chance in absolutely transforming a woman's existence, and began to dream vaguely of a magficent future which might perhaps be in store for her without her suspecting it.

In everybody's opinion Risler was a dishonored husband.

Two *tireurs*[1] in the printing-room — faithful pa-

[1] The name given to the boys who hold the ends of a roll of wall-paper while it is being printed.

trons of the Folies Dramatiques — declared that they had seen Madame Risler several times at their theatre, accompanied by some man who kept out of sight at the rear of the box. Père Achille, too, told of astounding things. That Sidonie had a lover, that she had several lovers in fact, no one entertained a doubt. But no one had as yet thought of Fromont Jeune.

And yet she showed no sort of prudence in her relations with him. On the contrary she seemed to make á parade of them; it may be that that was what saved them. How many times she accosted him boldly on the steps to agree upon a rendezvous for the evening! How many times she had amused herself making him shudder by speaking into his eyes before everyone! When the first confusion had passed, Georges was grateful to her for these exhibitions of audacity, which he attributed to the intensity of her passion. He was mistaken.

What she would have liked, although she did not admit it to herself, would have been to have Claire see them, to have her draw aside the curtain at her window, to have her conceive a suspicion of what was going on. She needed that in order to be perfectly happy: that her rival should be unhappy. But her wish was ungratified, Claire Fromont noticed nothing and lived, as Risler did, in imperturbable serenity.

Only Sigismond, the old cashier, was really ill at ease. And yet he was not thinking of Sidonie when, with his pen behind his ear, he paused a

moment in his work and gazed fixedly through his grating at the drenched soil of the little garden. He was thinking solely of his master, of Monsieur "Chorche," who was drawing a great deal of money now for his current expenses and sowing confusion in all his books. Every time it was some new excuse. He would come to the little wicket with an unconcerned air:

"Have you a little money, my good Planus? I was worsted again at *bouillotte* last night, and I don't want to send to the bank for such a trifle."

Sigismond Planus would open his cash-box with an air of regret to get the sum requested, and he would remember with terror a certain day when Monsieur Georges, then only twenty years old, had confessed to his uncle that he owed several thousand francs in gambling debts. The goodman thereupon conceived a violent antipathy for the club and contempt for all its members. A rich tradesman who was a member happened to come to the factory one day, and Sigismond said to him with brutal frankness:

"The devil take your Cercle du Château d'Eau! Monsieur Georges has left more than thirty thousand francs there in two months."

The other began to laugh.

"Why, you're greatly mistaken, Père Planus — it's at least three months since we have seen your master."

The cashier did not pursue the conversation; but a terrible thought took up its abode in his mind, and he turned it over and over all day long.

If Georges did not go to the club, where did he pass his evenings? Where did he spend so much money?

There was evidently a woman at the bottom of the affair.

As soon as that idea occurred to him, Sigismond Planus began to tremble seriously for his cash-box. That old bear from the canton of Berne, a confirmed bachelor, had a terrible dread of women in general and Parisian women in particular. He deemed it his duty first of all, in order to set his conscience at rest, to warn Risler. He did it at first in rather a vague way.

"Monsieur Chorche is spending a great deal of money," he said to him one day.

Risler exhibited no surprise.

"What do you expect me to do, my old Sigismond? It 's his right."

And the honest fellow meant what he said. In his eyes Fromont Jeune was the absolute master of the establishment. It would have been a fine thing, and no mistake, for him, an ex-draughtsman, to venture to make any comments. The cashier dared say no more until the day when a messenger came from a great shawl house with a bill for six thousand francs for a cashmere shawl.

He went to Georges in his office.

"Shall I pay it, monsieur?"

Georges Fromont was a little annoyed. Sidonie had forgotten to tell him of this latest purchase; she used no ceremony with him now.

"Pay it, pay it, Père Planus," he said, with a

shade of embarrassment, and added: "Charge it to the account of Fromont Jeune. It's a commission entrusted to me by a friend."

That evening, as Sigismond was lighting his little lamp, he saw Risler crossing the garden and tapped on the window to call him.

"It's a woman," he said under his breath. "I have the proof of it now."

As he uttered the awful words, "a woman," his voice shook with fear and was drowned in the great uproar of the factory. The sounds of the work in progress had a sinister meaning to the unhappy cashier at that moment. It seemed to him as if all the whirring machinery, the great chimney pouring forth its clouds of smoke, the noise of the workmen at their different tasks — as if all this tumult and animation and fatigue were for the benefit of a mysterious little being, dressed in velvet and bedecked with jewels.

Risler laughed at him and refused to believe him. He had long been acquainted with his compatriot's mania for detecting in everything the pernicious influence of woman. And yet Planus's words sometimes recurred to his thoughts, especially in the evening, when Sidonie, after all the commotion attendant upon the completion of her toilet, went away to the theatre with Madame Dobson, leaving the apartment very empty as soon as her long train had swept across the threshold. Candles burning in front of the mirrors, divers little toilet articles scattered about and thrown aside, told of extravagant caprices and a

reckless expenditure of money. Risler saw nothing of all that; but, when he heard Georges's carriage rolling through the court-yard, he had a feeling of discomfort at the thought of Madame Fromont passing her evenings entirely alone. Poor woman! Suppose what Planus said were true! Suppose Georges really had a second establishment! Oh! it would be frightful!

Thereupon, instead of beginning to work, he would go softly downstairs and ask if Madame were visible, deeming it his duty to keep her company.

The little girl was always in bed, but the little cap, the blue shoes were still lying in front of the fire. Claire was either reading or working, with her silent mother beside her, always rubbing or dusting with feverish energy, exhausting herself by blowing on the case of her watch, and nervously taking the same thing up and putting it down again ten times in succession, with the obstinate persistence of manias at their inception. Nor was honest Risler a very enlivening companion; but that did not prevent the young woman from welcoming him kindly. She knew all that was said about Sidonie in the factory; and although she did not believe half of it, the sight of the poor man, whom his wife left alone so often, moved her heart to pity. Mutual compassion formed the basis of that placid friendship, and nothing could be more touching than those two deserted ones, each pitying the other and each trying to divert the other's thoughts.

Seated at the small brightly lighted table in the

centre of the salon, Risler would gradually yield to the influence of the warmth of the fire and the harmony of his surroundings. He found there articles of furniture with which he had been familiar for twenty years, the portrait of his former employer, and his dear Madame "Chorche," bending over some little piece of needlework at his side, seemed to him even younger and more lovable among all those old souvenirs. From time to time she would rise to go and look at the child sleeping in the adjoining room, whose soft breathing they could hear in the intervals of silence. Without fully realizing it, Risler felt more comfortable and warmer there than in his own apartment; for on certain days those attractive rooms, where the doors were forever being thrown open for hurried exits or returns, gave him the impression of a hall without doors or windows, open to the four winds. His rooms were a camping ground; this was a home. A care-taking hand caused order and refinement to reign everywhere. The chairs seemed to be talking together in undertones, the fire burned with a delightful noise, and Mademoiselle Fromont's little cap retained in every bow of its blue ribbons suggestions of sweet smiles and childish glances.

And while Claire was thinking that such an excellent man deserved a better companion in life, Risler, watching the calm and lovely face turned toward him, the intelligent, kindly eyes, asked himself who the hussy could be for whom Georges Fromont neglected such an adorable woman.

VI.

THE INVENTORY.

THE house in which old Planus lived at Montrouge adjoined the one which the Chèbes had occupied for some time. There was the same ground floor with three windows, and a single floor above, the same garden with its lattice-work fence, the same borders of green box. There the old cashier lived with his sister. He took the first omnibus that left the office in the morning, returned at dinner time, and on Sundays remained at home, tending his flowers and his hens. The old maid was his housekeeper and did all the cooking and sewing. A happier couple never lived.

Celibates both, they were bound together by an equal hatred of marriage. The sister abhorred all men, the brother looked upon all women with suspicion; but withal they adored each other, each considering the other an exception to the general perversity of the sex.

In speaking of him, she always said: "Monsieur Planus, my brother!" — and he, with the same affectionate solemnity, interspersed all his sentences with "Mademoiselle Planus, my sister!" To those two retiring and innocent creatures, Paris, of which they knew nothing, although they visited it every day, was a den of monsters of two varieties,

bent upon doing one another the utmost possible injury; and whenever, amid the gossip of the quarter, a conjugal drama came to their ears, each of them, beset by his or her own idea, blamed a different culprit.

"It's the husband's fault," would be the verdict of "Mademoiselle Planus, my sister."

"It's the wife's fault," "Monsieur Planus, my brother," would reply.

"Oh! the men—"

"Oh! the women—"

That was their one never-failing subject of discussion in those rare hours of idleness which old Sigismond set aside in his busy day, which was as carefully ruled off as his account books. For some time past the discussions between the brother and sister had been marked by extraordinary animation. They were deeply interested in what was taking place at the factory. The sister was full of pity for Madame Fromont and considered her husband's conduct altogether outrageous; as for Sigismond, he could find no words bitter enough for the unknown trollop who sent bills for six thousand franc shawls to be paid from his cash-box. In his eyes the honor and fair fame of the old house he had served since his youth were at stake.

"What is going to become of us?" he repeated again and again. "Oh! these women—"

One day Mademoiselle Planus sat by the fire with her knitting, waiting for her brother.

The table had been laid for half an hour, and the old maid was beginning to be worried by such

unheard-of tardiness, when Sigismond entered with a most distressed face, and without a word, which was contrary to all his habits.

He waited until the door was shut tight, then said in a low voice, in response to his sister's disturbed and questioning expression:

"I have some news. I know who the woman is who is doing her best to ruin us."

Lowering his voice still more, after glancing about at the silent walls of their little dining-room, he uttered a name so unexpected that Mademoiselle Planus made him repeat it.

"Is it possible?"

"It 's the truth."

And, despite his grief, he had almost a triumphant air.

The old maid could not believe it. Such a refined, polite person, who had received her with so much cordiality! — How could anyone imagine such a thing?

"I have proofs," said Sigismond Planus.

Thereupon he told her how Père Achille had met Sidonie and Georges one night at eleven o'clock, just as they entered a small furnished lodging-house in the Montmartre quarter; and he was a man who never lied. They had known him for a long while. At all events, others had met them. Nothing else was talked about at the factory. Risler alone suspected nothing.

"But it is your duty to tell him," declared Mademoiselle Planus.

The cashier's face assumed a grave expression.

"It's a very delicate matter. In the first place, who knows whether he would believe me? There are blind men so blind that—And then, by interfering between the two partners, I risk the loss of my place. Oh! the women—the women! When I think how happy Risler might have been. When I sent for him to come to Paris with his brother, he had n't a sou; and to-day he 's at the head of one of the first houses in Paris. Do you suppose that he could be content with that? Oh! yes, of course. Monsieur must marry. As if anyone needed to marry! And, worse yet, he marries a Parisian woman, one of those frowsy-haired chits who are the ruin of an honest house, when he had right at his hand a fine girl, of almost his own age, a countrywoman, used to work, and well put together as you might say!"

"Mademoiselle Planus, my sister," to whose physical structure he alluded, had a magnificent opportunity to exclaim: "Oh! the men, the men!" but she was silent. It was a very delicate question, and perhaps, if Risler had chosen in time, he might have been the only one.

Old Sigismond continued:

"And this is what we have come to. For three months the leading wall-paper factory in Paris has been tied to the flounces of that good-for-nothing. You ought to see how the money flies. All day long I do nothing but open my wicket to meet Monsieur Georges's calls. He always applies to me, because at his banker's too much notice would be taken of it, whereas in our office money comes

and goes, comes in and goes out. But look out for the inventory! There 'll be some pretty figures to show at the end of the year. The worst part of the whole business is that Risler won't listen to anything. I have warned him several times: 'Look out, Monsieur Georges is making a fool of himself for that woman.' He either turns away with a shrug, or else he tells me that it 's none of his business and that Fromont Jeune is the master. Upon my word, one would almost think — one would almost think — "

The cashier did not finish his sentence; but his silence was pregnant with unspoken thoughts.

The old maid was appalled; but, like most women under such circumstances, instead of seeking a remedy for the evil, she wandered off into a maze of regrets, conjectures and retrospective lamentations. What a misfortune that they had not known it sooner when they had the Chèbes for neighbors. Madame Chèbe was such an honorable woman. They might have put the matter before her so that she would keep an eye on Sidonie and talk seriously to her.

" Indeed, that 's a good idea," Sigismond interrupted. " You must go to Rue du Mail and tell her parents. I thought at first of writing to little Frantz. He always had a great deal of influence over his brother, and he 's the only person on earth who could say certain things to him. But Frantz is so far away. And then it would be such a terrible thing to do. I can't help pitying that unlucky Risler, though. No! the best way is to

tell Madame Chèbe. Will you undertake to do it, sister?"

It was a dangerous commission. Mademoiselle Planus made some objections, but she had never been able to resist her brother's wishes, and the desire to be of service to their old friend Risler assisted materially in persuading her.

Thanks to his son-in-law's kindness, Monsieur Chèbe had succeeded in gratifying his latest whim. For three months past he had been living at his famous warehouse on Rue du Mail, and a great sensation was created in the quarter by that shop without merchandise, the shutters of which were taken down in the morning and put up again at night, as in wholesale houses. Shelves had been placed all around the walls, there was a new counter, a safe, a huge pair of scales. In a word, Monsieur Chèbe possessed all the requisites of a business of some sort, but did not know as yet just what business he would choose.

He pondered the subject all day as he walked to and fro across the shop, encumbered with several large pieces of bedroom furniture which they had been unable to get into the back shop; he pondered it too, as he stood on his doorstep, with his pen behind his ear, and feasted his eyes delightedly on the hurly-burly of Parisian commerce. The clerks who passed with their packages of samples under their arms, the vans of the express companies, the omnibuses, the porters, the wheelbarrows, the great bales of merchandise

at the neighboring doors, the packages of rich stuffs and trimmings which dragged in the mud of the gutter before being consigned to those underground regions, those dark holes stuffed with treasures, where the fortune of business houses lies in germ — all these things delighted Monsieur Chèbe.

He amused himself guessing at the contents of the bales and was first at the fray when some passer-by received a heavy package upon his feet, or the horses attached to a dray, spirited and restive, made the long vehicle standing across the street an obstacle to circulation. He had, moreover, the thousand and one distractions of the petty tradesman without customers, the heavy showers, the accidents, the thefts, the disputes.

At the end of the day Monsieur Chèbe, dazed, bewildered, worn out by the labor of other people, would stretch himself out in his easy-chair and say to his wife, as he wiped his forehead:

"That 's the kind of life I need — an active life."

Madame Chèbe would smile softly without replying. Accustomed as she was to all her husband's whims, she had made herself as comfortable as possible in a back shop with an outlook upon a dark yard, consoled herself with reflections on the former prosperity of her parents and her daughter's wealth, and, being always neatly dressed, had succeeded already in acquiring the respect of neighbors and tradesmen.

She asked nothing more than not to be confounded with the wives of working men, often less poor than herself, and to be allowed to retain, in

spite of everything, a petty bourgeois superiority. That was her constant thought; and so the back room in which she lived, and where it was dark at three in the afternoon, was resplendent with order and cleanliness. During the day the bed became a couch, an old shawl did duty as a table-cloth, the fire-place, hidden by a screen, served as a pantry, and the meals were cooked in modest retirement on a stove no larger than a foot-warmer. A tranquil life — that was the dream of the poor woman, who was constantly tormented by the tergiversations of an uncongenial companion.

In the early days of his tenancy Monsieur Chèbe had caused these words to be inscribed in letters a foot long on the fresh paint of his shop-front:

COMMISSION — EXPORTATION

No specifications. His neighbors sold tulle, broadcloth, linen; he was inclined to sell everything, but could not make up his mind just what. With what arguments did his indecision lead him to favor Madame Chèbe as they sat together in the evening!

"I don't know anything about linen; but when you come to broadcloth, I can take care of that. Only, if I go into broadcloths I must have a man to travel; for the best kinds come from Sedan and Elbeuf. I say nothing about calicoes; summer's the time for them. As for tulle, that's out of the question; the season is too far advanced."

He generally brought his discourse to a close with the words:

"The night will bring counsel — let's go to bed."

And to bed he would go, to his wife's great relief.

After three or four months of that existence, Monsieur Chèbe began to be tired of it. The pains in the head, the dizzy fits gradually returned. The quarter was noisy and unhealthy. Besides, business was at a standstill. There was nothing doing in any line, broadcloths, tissues or anything else.

It was just at the period of that new crisis that "Mademoiselle Planus, my sister," called to speak about Sidonie.

The old maid had said to herself on the way: "I must break it gently." But, like all shy people, she relieved herself of her burden in the first words she spoke after entering the house.

It was a stunning blow. When she heard the accusation made against her daughter, Madame Chèbe rose in indignation. No one could ever make her believe such a thing. Her poor Sidonie was the victim of an infamous slander.

Monsieur Chèbe, for his part, adopted a very lofty tone, with significant phrases and motions of the head, taking everything to himself as his custom was. How could any one suppose that *his* child, a Chèbe, the daughter of an honorable business man known for thirty years on the street, was capable of — Nonsense!

Mademoiselle Planus insisted. It was a painful thing to her to be considered a gossip, a hawker

of unsavory stories. But they had incontestable proofs. It was no longer a secret to anybody.

"And even suppose it was true," cried Monsieur Chèbe, furious at her persistence. "Is it for us to worry about it? Our daughter is married. She lives a long way from her parents. It's for her husband, who is much older than she, to advise and guide her. Does he so much as think of doing it?"

Upon that the little man began to inveigh against his son-in-law, that sluggish-blooded Swiss, who passed his life in his office devising machines, refused to accompany his wife into society, and preferred his old bachelor habits, his pipe and his brewery to everything else.

You should have seen the air of aristocratic disdain with which Monsieur Chèbe pronounced the words, "the brewery!" And yet almost every evening he went there to meet Risler, and overwhelmed him with reproaches if he once failed to appear at the rendezvous.

Behind all this verbiage the merchant of Rue du Mail —"commission, exportation" — had a very definite idea. He wished to give up his shop, to retire from business, and for some time he had been thinking of going to see Sidonie, in order to interest her in his new schemes. That was not the time, therefore, to make disagreeable scenes, to prate about paternal authority and conjugal honor. As for Madame Chèbe, being somewhat less confident than before of her daughter's infallibility, she took refuge in the most profound silence.

The poor woman wished that she were deaf and blind, — that she had never known Mademoiselle Planus.

Like all persons who have been very unhappy, she loved a benumbed existence with a semblance of tranquillity, and ignorance seemed to her preferable to everything. As if life were not sad enough, great God! And then, after all, Sidonie had always been a good girl; why should she not be a good woman?

Night was falling.

Monsieur Chèbe rose gravely to close the shutters of the shop, and light a gas-jet which illumined the bare walls, the empty polished shelves, and the whole extraordinary place, which reminded one strongly of the day following a failure. With his lips closed disdainfully, in his determination to remain silent, he seemed to say to the old maid: "Night has come — it's time for you to go home." And all the while they could hear Madame Chèbe sobbing in the back shop, as she went to and fro preparing supper.

Mademoiselle Planus got no further satisfaction from her visit.

"Well?" queried old Sigismond, who was impatiently awaiting her return.

"They would n't believe me, and politely showed me the door."

She had tears in her eyes at the thought of her humiliation.

The old man's face flushed, and he said in a grave voice, taking his sister's hand:

"Mademoiselle Planus, my sister, I ask your pardon for having made you take this step; but the honor of the house of Fromont was at stake."

From that moment Sigismond became more and more depressed. His cash-box no longer seemed to him safe or secure. Even when Fromont Jeune did not ask him for money, he was afraid, and he summed up all his apprehensions in four words which came constantly to his lips when talking with his sister:

"*I haf no gonfidence*," he would say, in his hoarse Swiss patois.

Thinking always of his cash-box, he dreamed sometimes that it had broken apart at all the joints, and insisted on remaining open, no matter how much he turned the key, or else that a high wind scattered all the papers, notes, checks, and bills, and that he ran after them all over the factory, tiring himself out in the attempt to pick them up.

In the daytime, as he sat behind his grating in the silence of his office, he imagined that a little white mouse had eaten its way through the bottom of the box and was gnawing and destroying all its contents, growing fatter and prettier as the work of destruction went on.

So that, when Sidonie appeared on the stoop about the middle of the afternoon, in her pretty cocotte's plumage, old Sigismond shuddered with rage. In his eyes it was the ruin of the house that stood there, ruin in a magnificent costume, with

her little coupé at the door, and the placid bearing of a happy coquette.

Madame Risler had no suspicion that, at that window on the ground floor, there was an untiring foe who watched her slightest movements, the most trivial details of her life, the going and coming of her music-teacher, the arrival of the fashionable dressmaker in the morning, all the boxes that were brought to the house, and the laced cap of the employés of the *Magasin du Louvre*, whose heavy wagon stopped at the gate with a jingling of bells, like a diligence drawn by stout horses, which were dragging the house of Fromont to bankruptcy at breakneck speed.

Sigismond counted the packages, weighed them with his eye as they passed, and gazed inquisitively into Risler's apartments through the open windows. The carpets that were shaken with a great noise, the jardinières that were brought into the sunlight filled with fragile, unseasonable flowers, rare and expensive, the gorgeous hangings — none of these things escaped his notice.

The new acquisitions of the household stared him in the face, reminding him of some request for a large amount.

But the one thing that he studied more carefully than all else was Risler's countenance.

In his view that woman was in a fair way to change his friend, the best, the most upright of men, into a shameless villain. There was no possibility of doubt that Risler knew of his dishonor, and submitted to it. He was paid to keep quiet.

Certainly there was something monstrous in such a supposition. But it is the tendency of innocent natures, when they are made acquainted with evil for the first time, to go at once too far, beyond reason. When he was once convinced of the treachery of Georges and Sidonie, Risler's degradation seemed to the cashier less impossible of comprehension. On what other theory could his indifference in the face of his partner's heavy expenditures be explained?

The excellent Sigismond in his narrow, stereotyped honesty, could not understand the delicacy of Risler's heart. At the same time the methodical book-keeper's habit of thought and his clear-sightedness in business were a thousand leagues from that absent-minded, flighty character, half-artist, half-inventor. He judged him by himself, having no conception of the condition of a man with the disease of invention, absorbed by a fixed idea. Such men are somnambulists. They look but do not see, their eyes being turned within.

It was Sigismond's belief that Risler did see.

That belief made the old cashier very unhappy. He began by staring at his friend whenever he entered the counting-room; then, discouraged by the immovable indifference, which he believed to be wilful and premeditated, fastened upon his face like a mask, he adopted the plan of turning away and fumbling among his papers to avoid those false glances, and keeping his eyes fixed on the garden paths or the interlaced wires of the grating when he spoke to him. Even his words were all con-

fused, distorted like his glances. No one could say positively to whom he was talking.

No more friendly smiles, no more reminiscences as they turned over the leaves of the cash-book together:

"This was the year you came to the factory. Your first increase of pay. Do you remember? We dined at Douix's that day. And then the Café des Aveugles in the evening, eh? What a debauch!"

At last Risler noticed the strange coolness that had sprung up between Sigismond and himself. He mentioned it to his wife.

For some time past she had felt that antipathy prowling about her. Sometimes, as she crossed the courtyard, she was oppressed, as it were, by malevolent glances which caused her to turn nervously toward the old cashier's corner. This estrangement between the friends alarmed her and she very quickly determined to put her husband on his guard against Planus' unpleasant remarks.

"Don't you see that he's jealous of you, of your position? A man who was once his equal, now his superior, — he can't stand that. But as if there was any need of bothering one's head about all these spiteful creatures. Why, I am surrounded by them here."

Risler looked at her with wide-open eyes: — "You?"

"Why, yes, it's easy enough to see all these people detest me. They bear little Chèbe a grudge because she has become Madame Risler Aîné.

God knows all the outrageous things that are said about me. And your cashier don't keep his tongue in his pocket, I promise you. What a spiteful fellow he is!"

These few words had their effect. Risler, indignant but too proud to complain, met coldness with coldness. Those two honest men, each intensely distrustful of the other, could no longer meet without a painful sensation, so that, after a while, Risler ceased to go to the counting-room at all. It was not difficult for him, as Fromont Jeune had charge of all financial matters. His month's allowance was carried to him on the thirtieth of each month. The arrangement afforded Sidonie and Georges additional facilities, and opportunity for all sorts of underhand dealing.

She thereupon turned her attention to the completion of her programme of a life of luxury. She lacked a country house. In her heart she detested the trees, the fields, the country roads that cover you with dust: "The most dismal things on earth," she used to say. But Claire Fromont passed the summer at Savigny. As soon as the first fine days arrived the trunks were packed and the curtains taken down on the floor below; and a great furniture van, with the little girl's blue bassinet rocking on top, set off for the grandfather's château. Then, one morning, the mother, grandmother, child and nurse, a medley of white gowns and light veils, would drive away behind two fast horses toward the sunny lawns and the pleasant shade of the avenues.

At that season Paris was ugly, depopulated; and although Sidonie loved it, even in the summer which heats it like a furnace, it troubled her to think that all the fashion and wealth of Paris were driving by the seashore under their light umbrellas, and would make their outing an excuse for a thousand new inventions, for original styles of the most *risqué* sort, which would permit one to show that one has a pretty leg and long, curly chestnut hair of one's own.

The seashore bathing resorts! She could not think of them; Risler could not leave Paris.

How about buying a country house? They had not the means.

To be sure, there was the lover, who would have asked nothing better than to gratify this latest whim; but a country house cannot be concealed like a bracelet or a shawl. The husband must be induced to accept it. That was not an easy matter; however, they might venture to try it with Risler.

To pave the way, she talked to him incessantly about a little nook in the country, not too expensive, very near Paris. Risler listened with a smile. He thought of the high grass, of the orchard filled with fine fruit trees, being already tormented by the longing to possess which comes with wealth; but as he was prudent, he said:

"We will see, we will see. Let's wait till the end of the year."

The end of the year, that is to say the balance-sheet.

The balance-sheet.

That is the magic word. All through the year we go on and on in the eddying whirl of business. Money comes and goes, circulates, attracts other money, vanishes; and the fortune of the firm, like a slippery, gleaming snake, always in motion, expands, contracts, diminishes or increases, and it is impossible to know our condition until there comes a moment of rest. Not until the inventory shall we know the truth, and whether the year, which seems to have been a prosperous one, has really been so.

The account of stock is usually taken late in December, between Christmas and New Year's Day. As it requires much extra labor to prepare it, everybody works far into the night. The whole establishment is on foot. The lamps remain lighted in the offices long after the doors are closed, and seem to share in the festal atmosphere peculiar to that last week of the year, when so many windows are illuminated for family gatherings. Everyone, even to the least important employé of the firm, is interested in the results of the inventory. The increases of salary, the New Year's presents depend upon those blessed figures. And so, while the vast interests of a wealthy house are trembling in the balance, the wives and children and aged parents of the clerks, in their fifth-floor tenements or poor apartments in the suburbs, talk of nothing but the inventory, the results of which will make themselves felt either by a greatly increased need of economy, or by some purchase, long post-

poned, which the New Year's gift will make possible at last.

On the premises of Fromont Jeune and Risler Aîné Sigismond Planus is the god of the establishment at that season, and his little office a sanctuary where all the clerks perform their devotions. In the silence of the sleeping factory, the heavy pages of the great books rustle as they are turned, and names called aloud cause search to be made in other books. Pens scratch. The old cashier, surrounded by his lieutenants, has a business-like, awe-inspiring air. From time to time Fromont Jeune, on the point of going out in his carriage, looks in for a moment, with a cigar in his mouth, neatly gloved and ready for the street. He walks slowly, on tiptoe, puts his face to the grating:

"Well! — are you getting on all right?"

Sigismond gives a grunt, and the young master takes his leave, afraid to ask any further questions. He knows from the cashier's expression that the showing will be a bad one.

In truth, since the days of the Revolution, when there was fighting in the very courtyard of the factory, so pitiable an inventory had never been seen in the Fromont establishment. Receipts and expenditures balanced each other. The general expense account had eaten up everything, and, furthermore, Fromont Jeune was indebted to the firm in a large sum. You should have seen old Planus's air of consternation when, on the 31st of December, he went up to Georges's office to make report of his labors.

Georges took a very cheerful view of the matter. Everything would go better next year. And to restore the cashier's good humor, he gave him an extraordinary bonus of a thousand francs, instead of the five hundred his uncle used always to give. Everybody felt the effects of that generous impulse, and, in the universal satisfaction, the deplorable results of the yearly accounting were very soon forgotten. As for Risler, Georges chose to take it upon himself to inform him as to the situation.

When he entered his partner's little closet, which was lighted from above by a window in the ceiling, so that the light fell directly upon the subject of the inventor's meditations, Fromont hesitated a moment, filled with shame and remorse for what he was about to do.

The other, when he heard the door, turned joyfully toward his partner.

"Chorche, Chorche, my dear fellow, — I have got it, our press. There are still a few little things to think out. But no matter! I am sure now of my invention, — you will see, — you will see! Ah! the Prochassons can dabble all they choose. With the *Risler Press* we will crush all rivalry."

"Bravo, my comrade," replied Fromont Jeune. "So much for the future; but you don't seem to think about the present. What about this inventory?"

"Ah, yes! to be sure. I had forgotten all about it. It is n't very satisfactory, is it?"

He said that because of the somewhat disturbed and embarrassed expression of Georges's face.

"Why, yes, on the contrary, it's very satisfactory indeed," was the reply. "We have every reason to be satisfied, especially as it's our first year. We have forty thousand francs each for our share of the profits; and as I thought you might need a little money to give your wife a New Year's present —"

Ashamed to meet the eyes of the honest man whose confidence he was betraying, Fromont Jeune placed a bundle of checks and notes on the table.

Risler was deeply moved for a moment. So much money at one time for him! His mind dwelt upon the generosity of these Fromonts, who had made him what he was; then he thought of his little Sidonie, of the longing which she had so often expressed and which he would now be able to gratify.

With tears in his eyes and a happy smile on his lips, he held out both hands to his partner.

"I am very happy, — I am very happy."

That was his favorite phrase on great occasions. Then he pointed to the bundles of bank-notes spread out before him in the narrow bands which are used to confine those fugitive documents, always ready to fly away.

"Do you know what that is?" he said to Georges, with an air of triumph. "That is Sidonie's house in the country."

Parbleu!

VII.

A LETTER.

"To M. Frantz Risler,

"*Engineer of the Compagnie Française,*

"*Ismailia, Egypt.*

"Frantz, my boy, it is old Sigismond who is writing to you. If I knew better how to put my ideas on paper, I should have a very long story to tell you. But this infernal French is too hard, and Sigismond Planus is good for nothing away from his figures. So I will tell you at once what the matter is.

"Things are taking place in your brother's house that are not as they should be. That woman is false to him with his partner. She has made her husband a laughing-stock, and if this goes on she will cause him to be looked upon as a knave. Look you, my little Frantz, you must come home at once. You 're the only one who can speak to Risler and open his eyes about that little Sidonie. He would n't believe any of us. Ask leave of absence at once, and come.

"I know that you have your bread to earn out there, and your future to assure; but a man of honor should think more of the name his parents

gave him than of anything else. And I tell you that if you don't come at once, a time will come when your name of Risler will be so loaded down with shame that you won't dare to bear it.

"SIGISMOND PLANUS.

"*Cashier.*"

BOOK THIRD.

I.

THE JUDGE.

THOSE persons who live always indoors, confined by work or infirmity to their chair by the window, take a deep interest in the people who pass, just as they make for themselves a horizon of the neighboring walls, roofs and windows.

Nailed to their place, they live in the life of the streets, and the busy men and women who pass within their range of vision, sometimes every day at the same hour, do not suspect that they serve as the mainspring of other lives, that loving eyes watch for their coming and miss them if they happen to go to their destination by another road.

The Delobelles, left to themselves all day, indulged in this sort of silent observation. Their window was narrow, and the mother, whose eyes were beginning to give out as the result of hard usage, sat near the light against the drawn muslin curtain; her daughter's large arm-chair was at her side but a little farther away. She announced the approach of their daily passers-by. It was a diversion, a subject of conversation; and the long hours of toil seemed shorter, marked off by the regular

appearances of people who were as busy as they. There were two little sisters, a gentleman in a gray overcoat, a child who was taken to school and taken home again, and an old government clerk with a wooden leg, whose step on the sidewalk had a sinister sound.

They hardly ever saw him; he passed after dark, but they heard him and the sound always struck the little cripple's ears like a harsh echo of her own most melancholy thoughts. All these street friends unconsciously occupied a large place in the lives of the two women. If it rained, they would say:

"They will get wet. — I wonder if the child got home before the shower." And when the season changed, when the March sun inundated the sidewalks or the December snow covered them with its white mantle and its patches of black slush, the appearance of a new garment on one of their friends caused the two recluses to say to themselves: "It is summer," or "Winter has come."

Now, on a certain evening in May, one of those soft luminous evenings when life flows forth from the houses into the street through the open windows, Désirée and her mother were actively at work with needles and fingers exhausting the daylight, to its last ray, before lighting the lamp. They could hear the shouts of children playing in the yards, the muffled notes of pianos, and the voice of a street peddler, drawing his half-empty wagon. One could smell the springtime in the air, a vague odor of hyacinth and lilac.

Delobelle's "mamma" had laid aside her work, and, before closing the window, leaned upon the sill listening to all these noises of a great toiling city, taking delight in walking through the streets when its day's work was ended. From time to time she spoke to her daughter, without turning her head.

"Ah! there 's Monsieur Sigismond. How early he leaves the factory to-night. It may be because the days are lengthening out so fast, but I don't think it can be seven o'clock. Who can that man be with the old cashier? — What a funny thing! — One would say — Why, yes — One would say it was Monsieur Frantz. But that is n't possible. Monsieur Frantz is a long way from here at this moment; and then he had no beard. That man looks ever so much like him all the same! Just look, my dear."

But "my dear" does not leave her chair; she does not even stir. Her eyes staring into vacancy, her needle in the air, arrested in its pretty industrious movement, she has gone away to the blue country, that wonderful country whither one may go at will, without thought of any infirmity. The name Frantz, uttered mechanically by her mother, because of a chance resemblance, represented to her a whole lifetime of illusions, of fervent hopes, ephemeral as the flush that rose to her cheeks when, on returning home at night, he used to come and chat with her a moment. How far away that was already! To think that he used to live in the little room near hers, that they used to hear his

step on the stairs and the noise made by his table when he dragged it to the window to draw. What sorrow and what pleasure she used to feel when he talked to her of Sidonie, sitting on the low chair at her knees, while she mounted her birds and her insects.

As she worked, she would cheer and comfort him, for Sidonie had caused poor Frantz many little griefs before the last great one. The tone of his voice when he spoke of Sidonie, the sparkle in his eyes when he thought of her, fascinated Désirée in spite of everything, so that when he went away in despair, he left behind him a love even greater than that he carried with him,—a love which the unchanging room, the sedentary, stagnant life kept intact with all its bitter perfume, whereas his would gradually fade away and vanish in the fresh air of the great highways.

It grows darker and darker. A great wave of melancholy envelops the poor girl with the falling darkness of that balmy evening. The blissful gleam from the past dies away as the last glimmer of daylight vanishes in the narrow recess of the window, where her mother still stands leaning on the sill.

Suddenly the door opens. Someone is there whose features cannot be distinguished. Who can it be? The Delobelles never receive calls. The mother, who has turned her head, thinks at first that someone has come from the shop to get their week's work.

"My husband has just gone to your place, mon-

sieur. We have nothing here. Monsieur Delobelle has taken everything."

The man comes forward without speaking, and as he approaches the window his features can be made out. He is a tall, solidly built fellow with a bronzed face, a thick sandy beard, and a deep voice, and is a little slow of speech.

"Aha! so you don't know me, Mamma Delobelle?"

"Oh! I knew you at once, Monsieur Frantz," said Désirée very calmly, in a cold, sedate tone.

"Merciful heaven! it's Monsieur Frantz."

Quickly, quickly Mamma Delobelle runs to the lamp, lights it and closes the window.

"What! it's you, is it, my dear Frantz?" How coolly she says it, the little rascal! "I knew you at once." Ah! the little iceberg. She will always be the same.

A veritable little iceberg, in very truth. She is pale, so pale; and her hand as it lies in Frantz's is all white and cold.

She seems to him improved, even more refined than before.

He seems to her superb, as always, with a melancholy, weary expression in the depths of his eyes, which makes him more of a man than when he went away.

His weariness is due to his hurried journey, undertaken immediately on his receipt of Sigismond's letter. Spurred on by the word dishonor, he had started instantly, without awaiting his leave of absence, risking his place and his future prospects;

and, hurrying from steamboats to railroads, he had not stopped until he reached Paris. Reason enough for being weary, especially when one has travelled in eager haste to reach one's destination, and when one's mind has been constantly beset by impatient thoughts, making the journey ten times over in incessant doubt and fear and perplexity.

His melancholy dates from farther back. It dates from the day when the woman he loved refused to marry him, to become, six months later, the wife of his brother; two terrible blows in close succession, the second even more painful than the first. It is true that, before entering into that marriage, Risler had written to him to ask his permission to be happy, and had written in such touching, affectionate terms, that the violence of the blow was somewhat diminished thereby; and then, in due time, the life in a strange country, the hard work and the long journeys had got the better of his grief. Now there remains only a vast background of melancholy. Unless, indeed, the hatred, the wrath by which he is animated at this moment against the woman who is dishonoring his brother, may be a remnant of his former love.

But no! Frantz Risler thinks only of avenging the honor of the Rislers. He comes not as a lover but as a judge; and Sidonie may well look to herself.

The judge had gone straight to the factory on leaving the train, relying upon the surprise, the unexpectedness of his arrival, to disclose to him at a glance what was taking place.

Unluckily he had found no one.

The blinds of the little house at the foot of the garden had been closed for two weeks.

Père Achille informed him that the ladies were at their respective country seats where the partners joined them every evening.

Fromont Jeune had left the factory very early; Risler Aîné had just gone.

Frantz decided to speak to old Sigismond. But it was Saturday, the regular pay-day, and he must needs wait until the long line of workmen, extending from Achille's lodge to the cashier's grated window, had gradually dropped away.

Although very impatient and very depressed, the excellent youth, who had lived the life of a Paris working man from his childhood, felt a thrill of pleasure at finding himself once more in the midst of the animated scenes peculiar to that time and place. Upon all those faces, honest or vicious, there was an expression of satisfaction that the week was at an end. You felt that, so far as they were concerned, Sunday began at seven o'clock Saturday evening, in front of the cashier's little lamp.

One must have lived among working men to realize the full charm of that one day's rest and its solemnity. Many of these poor creatures, bound fast to unhealthy trades, await the coming of the blessed Sunday like a puff of respirable air, essential to their health and their life. What an overflow of spirits, therefore, what a pressing need of noisy mirth! It seems as if the oppression of the

week's labor vanishes with the steam from the machinery, as it escapes in a hissing cloud of vapor over the gutters.

One by one the workmen moved away from the grating, counting the money that glistened in their black hands. There were disappointments, mutterings, remonstrances, hours missed, money drawn in advance; and above the tinkling of coins, Sigismond's voice could be heard, calm and relentless, defending the interests of his employers with a zeal amounting to ferocity.

Frantz was familiar with all the dramas of payday, the false accents and the true. He knew that one man's wages were expended for his family, to pay the baker, the druggist, or his children's schooling. Another wanted his money for the wine-shop, or for something even worse. And the melancholy, downcast shadows passing back and forth in front of the factory gateway, — he knew what they were waiting for, — that they were all on the watch for a father or a husband, to hurry him home with complaining or coaxing words.

Oh! the bare-footed children, the tiny creatures wrapped in old shawls, the shabby women, whose tear-stained faces were as white as the linen caps that surmounted them.

Oh! the lurking vice that prowls about on payday, the candles that are lighted in the depths of dark alleys, the dirty windows of the wineshops where the thousand and one poisonous concoctions of alcohol display their alluring colors.

Frantz was familiar with all these forms of

misery; but they had never seemed to him so depressing, so harrowing as on that evening.

When the last man was paid, Sigismond came out of his office.

The two friends recognized each other and embraced; and in the silence of the factory, at rest for twenty-four hours and deathly still in all its empty buildings, the cashier explained to Frantz the state of affairs. He described Sidonie's conduct, her mad extravagance, the utter wreck of the family honor. The Rislers had bought a country house at Asnières, formerly the property of an actress, and had set up a sumptuous establishment there. They had horses and carriages, and led a luxurious, fast life. The thing that especially disturbed honest Sigismond was the self-restraint of Fromont Jeune. For some time he had drawn almost no money from the strong-box, and yet Sidonie was spending more than ever.

"*I haf no gonfidence!*" said the unhappy cashier, shaking his head, "*I haf no gonfidence!*"

Lowering his voice, he added:

"But your brother, my little Frantz, your brother? Who can explain his actions? He goes about through it all with his eyes in the air, his hands in his pockets, his mind on his famous invention, which unfortunately does n't move fast. Look here! do you want me to give you my opinion? — He 's either a knave or a fool."

They were walking up and down the little garden as they talked, stopping for a moment, then resuming their walk. Frantz felt as if he were living in

a horrible dream. The rapid journey, the sudden change of scene and climate, the ceaseless flow of Sigismond's words, the new idea that he had to form of Risler and Sidonie — the same Sidonie he had loved so dearly — all these things bewildered him and almost drove him mad.

It was late. Night was falling. Sigismond proposed to him to go to Montrouge for the night; he declined on the plea of fatigue, and when he was left alone in the Marais, at that dismal and uncertain hour when the daylight has faded and the gas is still unlighted, he walked instinctively toward his old quarters on Rue de Braque.

At the hall door hung a placard. *Bachelor's Chamber to let.*

It was the same room in which he had lived so long with his brother. He recognized the map fastened to the wall by four pins, the window on the landing, and the Delobelles' little sign: *Birds and Insects for Ornament.*

Their door was ajar; he had only to push it a little in order to enter the room.

Certainly there was not in all Paris a surer refuge for him, a spot better fitted to welcome and console his perturbed spirit than that hard-working familiar fireside. In his present agitation and perplexity, it was like the harbor with its smooth, deep water, the sunny, peaceful quay, where the women work while awaiting their husbands and fathers, while the wind howls and the sea rages outside. More than all else, although he did not realize that it was so, it was a network of steadfast affection, that

miraculous loving-kindness which makes another's love precious to us even when we do not love that other.

That dear little iceberg of a Désirée loved him so dearly. Her eyes sparkled so even when talking of the most indifferent things with him. As objects dipped in phosphorus shine with equal splendor, so the most trivial words she said illuminated her pretty radiant face. What a blissful rest it was for him after Sigismond's brutal disclosures.

They talked together with great animation while Mamma Delobelle was setting the table.

"You will dine with us, won't you, Monsieur Frantz? Father has gone to take back the work; but he will surely come home to dinner."

He will surely come home to dinner!

The good woman said it with a certain pride.

In fact, since the failure of his managerial scheme, the illustrious Delobelle no longer took his meals abroad, even on the evenings when he went to collect the weekly earnings. The unlucky manager had eaten so many meals on credit at his restaurant that he dared not go there again. By way of compensation, he never failed, on Saturday, to bring home with him two or three unexpected, famished guests — "old comrades" — "unlucky devils." So it happened that, on the evening in question, he appeared upon the stage escorting a *financier* from the Metz theatre and a *comique* from the theatre at Angers, both on waiting orders.

The *comique*, closely shaven, wrinkled, shrivelled

by the heat from the footlights, looked like an old street-arab; the *financier* wore cloth shoes, and no linen so far as could be seen.

"Frantz! — my Frantz!" cried the old strolling player in a melodramatic voice, clawing the air convulsively with his hands; after a long and energetic embrace he presented his guests to one another.

"Monsieur Robricart, of the theatre at Metz.

"Monsieur Chaudezon, of the theatre at Angers.

"Frantz Risler, engineer."

In Delobelle's mouth that word engineer assumed vast proportions!

Désirée pouted prettily when she saw her father's friends. It would have been so nice to be by themselves on a day like to-day. But the great man snapped his fingers at the thought. He had enough to do to unload his pockets. First of all, he produced a superb pie, — "for the ladies," he said, forgetting that he adored pie. A lobster next made its appearance, then an Arles sausage, marrons glacés and cherries, the first of the season!

While the *financier* enthusiastically pulled up the collar of his invisible shirt, while the *comique* exclaimed "gnouf! gnouf!" with a gesture forgotten by Parisians for ten years, Désirée thought with dismay of the enormous hole that extempore banquet would make in the paltry earnings of the week, and Mamma Delobelle, full of business, upset the whole buffet in order to find a sufficient number of plates.

It was a very lively meal. The two actors ate voraciously, to the great delight of Delobelle, who talked over with them old memories of their days of strolling. Imagine a collection of odds and ends of scenery, extinct lanterns, and mouldy, crumbling stage properties.

In a sort of vulgar, meaningless, familiar slang they recalled their innumerable triumphs; for all three of them, according to their own stories, had been applauded, laden with laurel-wreaths and carried in triumph by whole cities.

While they talked they ate as actors eat, sitting with their faces turned three-fourths toward the audience, with the unnatural haste of stage guests at a pasteboard supper, alternating words and mouthfuls, seeking to produce an effect by their manner of putting down a glass or moving a chair, and expressing interest, amazement, joy, terror, surprise with the aid of a skilfully handled knife and fork. Mamma Delobelle listened to them with a smiling face.

One cannot be an actor's wife for thirty years without becoming somewhat accustomed to these peculiar mannerisms.

But one little corner of the table was separated from the rest of the party as by a cloud which intercepted the absurd remarks, the hoarse laughter, the boasting. Frantz and Désirée talked together in undertones, hearing naught of what was said around them. Things that happened in their childhood, anecdotes of the neighborhood, a whole ill-defined past which derived its only

value from the mutual memories evoked, from the spark that glowed in the eyes of both,— those were the themes of their pleasant chat.

Suddenly the cloud was torn aside and Delobelle's terrible voice interrupted the dialogue.

"Have you not seen your brother?" he asked, in order to avoid the appearance of neglecting him too much. "And you have not seen his wife either?—Ah! you will find her a Madame. Such toilettes, my dear fellow, and such *chic!* I just tell you. They have a genuine château at Asnières. The Chèbes are there also. Ah! my old friend, they have all left us behind. They are rich, they look down on old friends. Never a word, never a call. For my part, you understand, I snap my fingers at them, but it really wounds these ladies."

"Oh! papa," said Désirée hastily, "you know very well that we are too fond of Sidonie to be offended with her."

The actor smote the table a fierce blow with his fist.

"Why then you do wrong. You ought to be offended with people who seek constantly to wound and humiliate you."

He still had upon his mind the refusal to furnish funds for his theatrical project, and he made no secret of his wrath.

"If you knew," he said to Frantz, "if you knew how money is being squandered over yonder! It 's a great pity. And nothing substantial, nothing sensible. I, I who speak to you, asked

your brother for a paltry sum to assure my future and himself a handsome profit. He flatly refused. *Parbleu!* Madame is too exacting. She rides, goes to the races in her carriage, and drives her husband at the same rate as her little phaeton on the quay at Asnières. Between you and me I don't think that our good friend Risler is very happy. That woman makes him believe black is white."

The ex-actor concluded his harangue with a wink at the *comique* and the *financier*, and for a moment the three exchanged glances, conventional grimaces, *ha! has!* and *hum! hums!* and all the pantomime expressive of thoughts too deep for words.

Frantz was struck dumb. Do what he would, the horrible certainty assailed him on all sides. Sigismond had spoken in accordance with his nature, Delobelle with his. The result was the same.

Fortunately the dinner was drawing near its close. The three actors left the table and betook themselves to the brewery on Rue Blondel. Frantz remained with the two women.

As he sat beside her, gentle and affectionate in manner, Désirée was suddenly conscious of a great outflow of gratitude to Sidonie. She said to herself that after all it was to her generosity that she owed this semblance of happiness, and that thought gave her courage to defend her former friend.

"You see, Monsieur Frantz, you must n't believe all my father told you about your sister-in-law.

Dear papa! he always exaggerates a little. For my own part, I am very sure that Sidonie is incapable of all the evil she 's charged with. I am sure that her heart has remained the same and that she is still fond of her friends, although she does neglect them a little. Such is life, you know. Friends drift apart without meaning to. Is n't that true, Monsieur Frantz?"

Oh! how pretty she was in his eyes, while she talked in that strain. He had never taken so much notice of the refined features, the aristocratic complexion; and when he left her that evening, deeply touched by the warmth she had displayed in defending Sidonie, by all the charming feminine excuses she put forward for her friend's silence and neglect, Frantz Risler reflected, with a feeling of selfish and ingenuous pleasure, that the child had loved him once and that perhaps she loved him still and kept for him in the bottom of her heart that warm, sheltered spot to which we turn as to the sanctuary when life has wounded us.

All night long in his old room, lulled by the movement of the vessel, by the murmur of the waves and the howling of the wind which follow long sea-voyages, he dreamed of his youthful days, of little Chèbe and Désirée Delobelle, of their games, their labors, and of the École Centrale, whose great gloomy buildings were sleeping near at hand, in the dark streets of the Marais.

And when morning came, and the light shining in at his curtainless window vexed his eyes and brought him back to a realization of the duty that

lay before him and to the anxieties of the day, he dreamed that it was time to go to the School, and that his brother, before going down to the factory, opened the door and called to him:

"Come! lazybones. Come!"

That dear loving voice, too natural, too real for a dream, made him open his eyes without more ado.

Risler was standing by his bed, watching his awakening with a charming smile, not untinged by emotion; that it was Risler himself was evident from the fact that, in his joy at seeing his brother Frantz once more, he could find nothing better to say than: "I am very happy, I am very happy."

Although it was Sunday, Risler, as his custom was, had come to the factory to avail himself of the silence and solitude to work at his press. Immediately on his arrival, Père Achille had informed him that his brother was in Paris and had gone to the old house on Rue de Braque, and he had hastened thither in joyful surprise, a little vexed that he had not been forewarned, and especially that Frantz had defrauded him of the first evening. His regret on that account came to the surface every moment in his spasmodic attempts at conversation, in which everything that he wanted to say was left unfinished, interrupted by innumerable questions on all sorts of subjects and explosions of affection and joy. Frantz excused himself on the plea of fatigue and the pleasure it had given him to be in their old room once more.

"All right, all right," said Risler, "but I sha'n't let you alone now — you are coming to Asnières at once. I give myself leave of absence to-day. All thought of work is out of the question now that you have come, you understand. Ah! won't the little one be surprised and glad! We talk about you so often. What joy! what joy!"

The poor fellow fairly beamed with happiness, he, the silent man, chattered like a magpie, gazed admiringly at his Frantz and remarked upon his growth. The pupil at the École Centrale had a fine physique when he went away; but his features had acquired greater firmness, his shoulders were broader, and it was a far cry from the tall studious-looking boy who had left Paris two years before for Ismailia, to this handsome bronzed corsair, with his serious yet winning face.

While Risler was gazing at him, Frantz, on his side, was closely scrutinizing his brother, and, finding him the same as always, as ingenuous, as loving, and as absent-minded at times, he said to himself:

"No! it is not possible — he has not ceased to be an honest man."

Thereupon, as he reflected upon what people had dared to imagine, all his wrath turned against that hypocritical, vicious woman, who deceived her husband so impudently and with such absolute impunity, that she succeeded in causing him to be considered her confederate. Oh! what a terrible reckoning he proposed to have with her; how pitilessly he would talk to her!

"I forbid you, Madame — understand what I say — I forbid you to dishonor my brother!"

He was thinking of that all the way, as he watched the still leafless trees glide along the banking of the Saint Germain railway. Sitting opposite him, Risler chattered, chattered without pause. He talked about the factory, about their business. They had gained forty thousand francs each the last year; but it would be a different matter when the *Press* was at work. "A rotary press, my little Frantz, rotary and dodecagonal, capable of printing a pattern in twelve to fifteen colors at a single turn of the wheel — red on pink, dark green on light green, without the least running together or absorption, without a line lapping over its neighbor, without any danger of one shade destroying or overshadowing another. Do you understand that, little brother? A machine that is an artist like a man. It means a revolution in the wall-paper trade."

"But," queried Frantz with some anxiety, "have you invented this *Press* of yours yet, or are you still hunting for it?"

"Invented! — perfected! To-morrow I will show you all my plans. I have also invented an automatic crane for hanging the paper on the rods in the drying room. Next week I propose to take up my quarters in the factory, way up in the garret, and have my first machine made there secretly, under my own eyes. In three months the patents must be taken out and the *Press* must be at work. You 'll see, my little Frantz, it will make us all

rich — you can imagine how glad I shall be to be able to make up to these Fromonts for a little of what they have done for me. Ah! upon my word, the Lord has been too good to me."

Thereupon he set about enumerating all his blessings. Sidonie was the best of women, a little love of a wife, who conferred much honor upon him. They had a charming home. They went into society, very select society. The little one sang like a nightingale, thanks to Madame Dobson's expressive method. By the way, this Madame Dobson was another most excellent creature. There was just one thing that disturbed poor Risler, that was his incomprehensible falling-out with Sigismond. Perhaps Frantz would help him to clear up that mystery.

"Oh! yes, I will help you, brother," replied Frantz through his clenched teeth; and an angry flush rose to his brow at the idea that any one could have suspected the open-heartedness, the loyalty that were displayed before him in all their artless spontaneity. Luckily he, the judge, had arrived; and he proposed to restore everything to its proper place.

Meanwhile, they were drawing near the house at Asnières. Frantz had noticed at a distance a fanciful little turreted affair, glistening with new blue slates. It seemed to him to have been built expressly for Sidonie, a fitting cage for that capricious, gaudy-plumaged bird.

It was a châlet with two stories, whose bright mirrors and pink-lined curtains could be seen

from the railway, shining resplendent at the far end of a green lawn, where an enormous pewter ball was suspended.

The river was near at hand, still wearing its Parisian aspect, filled with chains, bathing establishments, great barges, and multitudes of little skiffs, with a layer of coal dust on their pretentious freshly-painted names, tied to the pier and rocking to the slightest motion of the water. From her windows Sidonie could see the waterside restaurants, silent through the week, but filled to overflowing on Sunday with a motley, noisy crowd, whose shouts of laughter, mingled with the dull splash of oars, started from both banks to meet in midstream in that current of vague murmurs, shouts, calls, laughter and singing that floats without ceasing up and down the Seine on holidays for a distance of ten leagues.

During the week she saw shabbily dressed idlers sauntering along the shore, men in broad-brimmed straw hats and flannel shirts, women who sat on the worn grass of the sloping bank, doing nothing, with the dreamy eye of a cow at pasture. All the peddlers, hand-organs, harpists, travelling jugglers, stopped there as at a quarantine station. The quay was crowded with them, and as they approached, the windows in the little houses near by were always thrown open, disclosing white dressing-jackets, half-buttoned, heads of dishevelled hair, and an occasional pipe, all watching these paltry strolling shows, as if with a sigh of regret for Paris, so near at hand.

It was a hideous and depressing sight.

The grass, which had hardly begun to grow, was already turning yellow beneath the feet of the crowd. The dust was black; and yet, every Thursday, the cocotte aristocracy passed through on the way to the Casino, with a great show of rickety carriages and borrowed postilions. All these things gave pleasure to that fanatical Parisian, Sidonie; and then, too, in her childhood, she had heard a great deal about Asnières from the illustrious Delobelle, who would have liked to have, like so many of his profession, a little villa in those latitudes, a cosy nook in the country to which to return by the 12.30 train, after the play is done.

All these dreams of little Chèbe's, Sidonie Risler had realized.

The brothers went to the gate opening on the quay, in which the key was usually left. They entered, making their way among trees and shrubs of recent growth. Here and there a billiard room, the gardener's lodge, a little greenhouse, made their appearance, like the pieces of one of the Swiss châlets we give to children to play with; all very light and airy, hardly more than resting on the ground, as if ready to fly away at the slightest breath of bankruptcy or caprice: the villa of a cocotte or a pawnbroker.

Frantz looked about in some bewilderment. In the distance, opening on a porch surrounded by vases of flowers, was the salon with its long blinds raised. An American easy-chair, folding-chairs, a small table from which the coffee had not been

removed, could be seen near the door. Within they heard a succession of loud chords on the piano, and the murmur of low voices.

"I tell you Sidonie will be surprised," said honest Risler, walking softly on the gravel; "she does n't expect me until to-night. She and Madame Dobson are practising together at this moment."

Pushing the door open suddenly, he cried from the threshold in his loud, good-natured voice:

"Guess whom I 've brought."

Madame Dobson, who was sitting alone at the piano, jumped up from her stool, and at the farther end of the grand salon Georges and Sidonie rose hastily behind the exotic plants that reared their heads above a table, of whose delicate, slender lines they seemed a prolongation.

"Ah! how you frightened me!" said Sidonie, running to meet Risler.

The flounces of her white peignoir, through which blue ribands were drawn, like little patches of blue sky among the clouds, rolled in billows over the carpet, and, having already recovered from her embarrassment, she stood very straight, with an affable expression and her everlasting little smile, as she kissed her husband and offered her forehead to Frantz, saying:

"Good morning, brother."

Risler left them confronting each other, and went up to Fromont Jeune, whom he was greatly surprised to find there.

"What, Chorche, you here? I supposed you were at Savigny."

"'Ah! how you frightened me!' said Sidonie, running to meet Risler."

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"Yes, to be sure, but — I came — I thought you stayed at Asnières Sundays. I wanted to speak to you on a matter of business."

Thereupon, entangling himself in his words, he began to talk hurriedly of an important order. Sidonie had disappeared after exchanging a few unmeaning words with the impassive Frantz. Madame Dobson continued her tremolos on the soft pedal, like those which accompany critical situations at the theatre.

In very truth, the situation at that moment was decidedly strained. But Risler's good humor banished all constraint. He apologized to his partner for not being at home, and insisted upon showing Frantz the house. They went from the salon to the stable, from the stable to the carriage-house, the servants' quarters and the conservatory. Everything was new, brilliant, gleaming, too small, and inconvenient.

"But," said Risler, with a certain pride, "it cost a lot of money!"

He persisted in compelling admiration of Sidonie's purchase even to its smallest details, exhibited the gas and water fixtures on every floor, the improved system of bells, the garden seats, the English billiard table, the hydropathic arrangements, and accompanied his exposition with outbursts of gratitude to Fromont Jeune, who, by taking him into partnership, had literally placed a fortune in his hands.

At each new effusion on Risler's part, Georges Fromont shrank visibly, ashamed and embarrassed by the strange expression on Frantz's face.

The breakfast was lacking in gayety.

Madame Dobson talked almost without interruption, overjoyed to be swimming in the shallows of a romantic love-affair. Knowing, or rather believing that she knew her friend's story from beginning to end, she understood the lowering wrath of Frantz, a former lover furious at finding his place filled, and the anxiety of Georges, due to the appearance of a rival; and she encouraged one with a glance, consoled the other with a smile, admired Sidonie's tranquil demeanor, and reserved all her contempt for that abominable Risler, the vulgar, uncivilized tyrant. Her efforts were especially directed to the end that there should be none of those horrible periods of silence, when the clashing knives and forks mark time in such an absurd and embarrassing way.

As soon as breakfast was at an end Fromont Jeune announced that he must return to Savigny. Risler did not dare detain him, thinking that his dear Madame Chorche would pass her Sunday all alone; and so, without an opportunity to say a word to his mistress, the lover went away in the bright sunlight to take an afternoon train, still attended by the husband, who insisted upon escorting him to the station.

Madame Dobson sat for a moment with Frantz and Sidonie under a little arbor which a climbing vine studded with pink buds; then, realizing that she was in the way, she returned to the salon, and as before, while Georges was there, began to play and sing softly and with expression. In the silent

garden, that muffled music, gliding between the branches, seemed like the cooing of birds before the storm.

At last they were alone.

Under the lattice of the arbor, still bare and leafless, the May sun shone too bright. Sidonie shaded her eyes with her hand as she watched the people passing on the quay. Frantz likewise looked out, but in another direction; and both of them, affecting to be entirely independent of each other, turned at the same instant with the same gesture and moved by the same thought.

"I have something to say to you," he said, just as she opened her mouth.

"And I to you," she replied gravely; "but come in here; we shall be more comfortable."

And they entered together a little summer-house at the foot of the garden.

II.

EXPLANATION.

VERILY it was high time that the judge should come.

This little woman was whirling madly around in the Parisian maëlstrom. Upheld by her very lightness, she still remained on the surface; but her outrageous extravagance, the ostentatious luxury of her surroundings, her rapidly increasing contempt for all the proprieties of life, all announced that she would soon sink, dragging with her her husband's honor, and, it might be, the fortune and good name of a prominent business house, ruined by her madness.

Her present environment tended to hasten her destruction. At Paris, in the quarters inhabited by petty tradesmen, which are veritable provincial towns for malevolence and gossip, she was obliged to be more careful; but in her house at Asnières, surrounded by strolling actors' cottages, contraband households, dry goods clerks on a vacation, she did not feel the same restraint. There was an atmosphere of vice about her which suited her, which she breathed without distaste. The music of the ball-room entertained her in the evening, as she sat in her little garden.

A pistol-shot in the next house one night, which set the whole neighborhood agog over a commonplace, foolish intrigue, made her dream of similar adventures. She would have liked to be the heroine of a "story" herself. Throwing aside all restraint in the matter of language and dress, on the days when she did not ride on the quay at Asnières, in a short skirt and twirling a hunting-crop in her hand, like a female dandy at Trouville or Houlgate, she remained at home, dressed in a wrapper like her neighbors, absolutely inactive, paying little or no attention to her house, where her servants robbed her like a cocotte without a suspicion on her part. This same woman, who was seen in the saddle every morning, passed whole hours talking with her maid of the strange households that surrounded her.

By slow degrees she sank to her former level, yes, even lower. From the rich, well-considered bourgeoisie to which her marriage had raised her, she descended the ladder to the rank of kept woman. By dint of travelling in railway carriages with fantastically dressed courtesans, with their hair worn over their eyes like a terrier's, or falling over the back à la Geneviève de Brabant, she came at last to resemble them. She transformed herself into a blonde for two months, to the unbounded amazement of Risler, who could not understand how his doll was so changed. As for Georges, all these eccentricities amused him; it seemed to him that he had ten women in one. He was the real husband, the master of the house.

To divert Sidonie's thoughts, he had provided a simulacrum of society for her — his bachelor friends, a few fast tradesmen, almost no women; women have too sharp eyes. Madame Dobson was the only friend of Sidonie's sex.

They organized grand dinner-parties, excursions on the water, fireworks. From day to day Risler's position became more absurd, more distressing. When he came home in the evening, tired out, shabbily dressed, he must hurry up to his room to dress.

"We have some people to dinner," his wife would say. "Make haste."

And he would be the last to take his place at the table, after shaking hands all around with his guests, friends of Fromont Jeune, whom he hardly knew by name. Strange to say, the affairs of the factory were often discussed at that table, to which Georges brought his acquaintances from the club with the tranquil self-assurance of the gentleman who pays.

"Business breakfasts and dinners!" To Risler's mind that phrase explained everything: his partner's constant presence, his choice of guests, and the marvellous gowns worn by Sidonie, who beautified herself in the interest of the firm. This coquetry on his mistress's part drove Fromont Jeune to despair. Day after day he came unexpectedly to take her by surprise, uneasy, suspicious, afraid to leave that perverse and deceitful character to its own devices for long.

"What in the deuce has become of your hus-

band?" Père Gardinois would ask his granddaughter with a cunning leer. "Why does n't he come here oftener?"

Claire apologized for Georges, but his constant neglect began to disturb her. She wept now when she received the little notes, the despatches which arrived daily at the dinner hour: "Don't expect me to-night, dear love. I shall not be able to come to Savigny until to-morrow or the day after by the night-train."

She ate her dinner sadly, opposite an empty chair, and although she did not know that she was betrayed, she felt that her husband was becoming accustomed to live away from her. He was so distraught when a family gathering or some other unavoidable duty detained him at the château, so reticent concerning what was in his mind. Claire, having now only the most distant relations with Sidonie, knew nothing of what was taking place at Asnières: but when Georges left her, apparently eager to be gone, and with smiling face, she tormented her loneliness with unavowed suspicions, and, like all those who anticipate a great sorrow, she suddenly became conscious of a great void in her heart, a place made ready for disasters to come.

Her husband was hardly happier than she. That cruel Sidonie seemed to take pleasure in tormenting him. She allowed everybody to pay court to her. At that moment a certain Cazabon, *alias* Cazaboni, an Italian tenor from Toulouse, introduced by Madame Dobson, came every day

to sing disturbing duets. Georges, jealous beyond words, hurried to Asnières in the afternoon, neglected everything, and was already beginning to think that Risler did not watch his wife closely enough. He would have liked him to be blind only so far as he was concerned.

Ah! if he had been her husband, what a tight rein he would have kept on her! But he had no power over her and she was not at all backward about telling him so. Sometimes, too, with the invincible logic that often occurs to the greatest fools, he reflected that, as he was deceiving his friend, perhaps he deserved to be deceived. In short, his was a wretched life. He passed his time running about to jewellers and dry goods dealers, inventing gifts and surprises. Ah! he knew her well. He knew that he could amuse her with trinkets, not retain his hold upon her, and that, when the day came that she was bored ——

But Sidonie was not bored as yet. She was living the life that she longed to live; she had all the happiness she could hope to attain. There was nothing passionate or romantic about her love for Georges. He was like a second husband to her, younger and, above all, richer than the other. To complete the vulgarization of their liaison, she had summoned her parents to Asnières, quartered them in a little house in the country, and made of that vain and wilfully blind father and that affectionate, still bewildered mother a halo of respectability of which she felt the necessity as she sank lower and lower.

Everything was shrewdly planned in that perverse little brain, which reflected coolly upon vice; and it seemed to her as if she might continue to live thus in peace, when Frantz Risler suddenly arrived.

Simply from seeing him enter the room, she had realized that her repose was threatened, that an interview of the gravest importance was to take place between them.

Her plan was formed on the instant. It remained to put it in execution.

The summer-house that they entered contained one large circular room with four windows, each looking out upon a different landscape; it was furnished for the purposes of summer siestas, for the hot hours when one seeks shelter from the sunlight and the noises of the garden. A broad, very low divan ran all around the wall. A small lacquered table, also very low, stood in the middle of the room, covered with odd numbers of society journals.

The hangings were new, and the Persian pattern — birds flying among bluish reeds, — produced the effect of a dream in summer, ethereal figures floating before one's drooping eyes. The lowered blinds, the matting on the floor, the Virginia jasmine clinging to the trellis-work outside, produced a refreshing coolness which was enhanced by the constant splashing in the river near by, and the lapping of its tiny wavelets on the shore.

Sidonie sat down as soon as she entered the

room, throwing aside her long white skirt, which sank like a mass of snow at the foot of the divan; and with sparkling eyes and a smile playing about her lips, bending her little head slightly, its saucy coquettishness heightened by the bow of ribbon on the side, she waited.

Frantz, pale as death, remained standing, looking about the room. After a moment he began:

"I congratulate you, Madame; you understand how to make yourself comfortable."

And in the next breath, as if he were afraid that the conversation, beginning at such a distance, would not arrive quickly enough at the point to which he intended to lead it, he added brutally:

"To whom do you owe this magnificence, to your lover or your husband?"

Without moving from the divan, without even raising her eyes to his, she answered:

"To both."

He was a little disconcerted by such self-possession.

"Then you confess that that man is your lover?"

"Confess it! —*parbleu*, yes!"

Frantz gazed at her a moment without speaking. She too had turned pale, notwithstanding her calmness, and the everlasting little smile no longer quivered at the corners of her mouth.

He continued:

"Listen to me, Sidonie. My brother's name, the name he gave his wife, is mine as well. Since Risler is so foolish, so blind as to allow the name

to be dishonored by you, it is my place to defend it against your attacks. I beg you, therefore, to inform Monsieur Georges Fromont that he must change mistresses as soon as possible, and go elsewhere to ruin himself. If not — "

"If not?" queried Sidonie, who had not ceased to play with her rings while he was speaking.

"If not, I shall tell my brother what is going on in his house, and you will be surprised at the Risler whose acquaintance you will make then — a man as violent and ungovernable as he usually is inoffensive. My disclosure will kill him perhaps, but you can be sure that he will kill you first."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well! let him kill me. What do I care for that?"

This was said with such a heartbroken, utterly despondent air, that Frantz, in spite of himself, felt a little pity for that beautiful, fortunate young creature, who talked of dying with such self-abandonment.

"Do you love him so dearly?" he said, in an indefinably milder tone. "Do you love this Fromont so dearly that you prefer to die rather than renounce him?"

She hastily drew herself up.

"I? Love that fop, that doll, that silly girl in men's clothes? Nonsense! — I took him as I would have taken any other man."

"Why?"

"Because I could n't help it, because I was mad, because I had and still have in my heart a criminal

love, which I am determined to tear out, no matter at what cost."

She had risen and was speaking with her eyes in his, her lips near his, shivering from head to foot.

A criminal love! — Whom did she love, in God's name?

Frantz was afraid to question her.

Although suspecting nothing as yet, he had a feeling that that glance, that breath, leaning toward him, were about to make some horrible disclosure.

But his office of judge made it necessary for him to know all.

"Who is it?" he asked.

She replied in a stifled voice:

"You know very well that it is you."

She was his brother's wife.

For two years he had not thought of her except as a sister. In his eyes his brother's wife in no way resembled his former fiancée, and it would have been a crime to recognize in a single feature of her face the woman to whom he had formerly so often said: "I love you."

And now it was she who said that she loved him.

The unhappy judge was thunderstruck, dazed, could find no words in which to reply.

She, standing before him, waited.

It was one of those spring days, full of heat and light, to which the moisture of recent rains imparts a strange softness and melancholy. The air was warm, perfumed by fresh flowers which, on that

first day of heat, gave forth their fragrance eagerly, like violets in a muff. Through its long, open windows the room in which they were inhaled all those intoxicating odors. Outside, they could hear the Sunday organs, distant shouts on the river, and nearer at hand, in the garden, Madame Dobson's amorous, languishing voice, sighing:

"On dit que tu te maries;
Tu sais que j'en puis mouri-i-i-r!"

"Yes, Frantz, I have always loved you," said Sidonie. "That love which I renounced long ago because I was a young girl, and young girls do not know what they are doing, — that love nothing has ever succeeded in destroying or lessening. When I learned that Désirée also loved you, the unfortunate, penniless child, in a great outburst of generosity I determined to assure her happiness for life by sacrificing my own, and I at once turned you away, so that you should go to her. Ah! as soon as you had gone, I realized that the sacrifice was beyond my strength. Poor little Désirée! How I cursed her in the bottom of my heart! Will you believe it? Since that time I have avoided seeing her, meeting her. The sight of her caused me too much pain."

"But if you loved me," asked Frantz, in a low voice, "if you loved me, why did you marry my brother?"

She did not waver.

"To marry Risler was to bring myself nearer to you. I said to myself: 'I could not be his wife.

Very well, I will be his sister. At all events, in that way it will still be allowable for me to love him, and we shall not pass our whole lives as strangers.' Alas! those are the innocent dreams a girl has at twenty, dreams of which she very soon learns the impossibility. I could n't love you as a sister, Frantz; I could n't forget you, either; my marriage prevented that. With another husband I might perhaps have succeeded, but with Risler it was terrible. He was forever talking about you and your success and your future. — Frantz said this; Frantz did that. — He loves you so well, poor fellow. And then the most cruel thing to me is that your brother looks like you. There 's a sort of family resemblance in your features, in your gait, in your voices especially, for I have often closed my eyes under his caresses, saying to myself: 'It is he, it is Frantz.' When I saw that that criminal thought was becoming a source of torment to me, something that I could not escape, I tried to find distraction, I consented to listen to this Georges, who had been pestering me for a long time, to transform my life to one of noise and excitement. But I swear to you, Frantz, that in that whirlpool of pleasure into which I then plunged, I have never ceased to think of you, and if anyone had a right to come here and call me to account for my conduct, you certainly are not the one, for you, unintentionally, have made me what I am."

She paused.

Frantz dared not raise his eyes to her face. For

a moment past she had seemed to him too lovely, too alluring. She was his brother's wife!

Nor did he dare speak. The unfortunate youth felt that the old passion was despotically taking possession of his heart once more, and that at that moment glances, words, everything that burst forth from it would be love.

And she was his brother's wife!

"Ah! wretched, wretched creatures that we are!" exclaimed the poor judge, dropping upon the divan beside her.

Those few words were in themselves an act of cowardice, a beginning of surrender, as if destiny, by showing itself so pitiless, had deprived him of the strength to defend himself. Sidonie had placed her hand on his. "Frantz — Frantz!" she said; and they remained there side by side, silent and burning with emotion, soothed by Madame Dobson's romanza, which reached their ears by snatches through the shrubbery:

"*Ton amour, c'est ma folie.*
Hélas! je n'en puis guéri-i-i-r."

Suddenly Risler's tall figure appeared in the doorway.

"This way, Chèbe, this way. They are in the summer-house."

As he spoke, the goodman entered, escorting his father-in-law and mother-in-law, whom he had gone to fetch.

There was a moment of effusive greetings and innumerable embraces. You should have seen the

patronizing air with which Monsieur Chèbe scrutinized the young man, who was head and shoulders taller than he.

"Well, my boy, does the Suez canal progress as you would wish?"

Madame Chèbe, in whose thoughts Frantz had never ceased to be her future son-in-law, threw her arms around him, while Risler, tactless as usual in his gayety and his enthusiasm, waved his arms madly on the stoop, talked of killing several fatted calves to celebrate the return of the prodigal son, and roared to the singing-mistress in a voice that echoed through the neighboring gardens:

"Madame Dobson, Madame Dobson — if you 'll allow me, it 's a pity for you to be singing there. To the devil with expression for to-day. Play us something lively, a good waltz, so that I can take a turn with Madame Chèbe."

"Risler, Risler, are you crazy, my son-in-law?"

"Come, come, mamma! We must — *hop!*"

And up and down the paths, to the strains of an automatic six-step waltz — a genuine *valse de Vaucanson* — he dragged his breathless mamma-in-law, who stopped at every step to restore to their usual orderliness the dangling ribands of her hat and the lace trimming of her shawl, her lovely shawl bought for Sidonie's wedding.

Poor Risler was drunk with joy.

To Frantz that was an endless, indelible day of agony. Driving, rowing on the river, lunch on the grass on the Île des Ravageurs — he was spared none of the charms of Asnières; and all the time,

in the glaring sunlight of the roads, in the glare reflected by the water, he must laugh and chatter, describe his journey, talk of the Isthmus of Suez and the great work undertaken there, listen to the whispered complaints of Monsieur Chèbe, who was still incensed with his children, and to his brother's description of the *Press*. "Rotary, my dear Frantz, rotary and dodecagonal!" Sidonie left the gentlemen to their conversation and seemed absorbed in deep thought. From time to time she said a word or two to Madame Dobson, or smiled sadly at her, and Frantz, not daring to look at her, followed the motions of her blue-lined parasol and of the white flounces of her dress.

How she had changed in two years! How lovely she had grown!

Then horrible thoughts came to his mind. There were races at Longchamps that day. Carriages passed theirs, rubbed against it, driven by women with painted faces, closely veiled. Sitting motionless on the box, they held their long whips straight in the air, with doll-like gestures, and nothing about them seemed alive except their blackened eyes, fixed on the horses' heads. As they passed, people turned to look. Every eye followed them, as if drawn by the wind caused by their rapid motion.

Sidonie resembled those creatures. She might herself have driven Georges's carriage; for Frantz was in Georges's carriage. He had drunk Georges's wine. All the luxurious enjoyment of that family party came from Georges.

It was shameful, revolting. He would have liked to shout the whole story to his brother. Indeed it was his duty, as he had come there for that express purpose. But he no longer felt the courage to do it.

Ah! the unhappy judge!

That evening after dinner, in the salon open to the fresh breeze from the river, Risler begged his wife to sing. He wished her to exhibit all her newly-acquired talents to Frantz.

Sidonie, leaning on the piano, objected with a melancholy air, while Madame Dobson ran her fingers over the keys, shaking her long curls.

"But I don't know anything. What do you want me to sing?"

She ended, however, by being persuaded. Pale, disenchanted, with her mind upon other things, in the flickering light of the candles which seemed to be burning incense, the air was so heavy with the odor of the hyacinths and lilacs in the garden, she began a Creole ballad very popular in Louisiana, which Madame Dobson herself had arranged for the voice and piano:

"Pauv' pitit Mam'zelle Zizi,
C'est l'amou, l'amou qui tourne la tête à li." [1]

And as she told the story of the ill-fated little Zizi, who was driven mad by passion, Sidonie had the appearance of a lovesick woman. With what heartrending expression, with the cry of a wounded

[1] "Poor little Mam'zelle Zizi,
'T is love, 't is love that turns her head."

dove, did she repeat that refrain, so melancholy and so sweet, in the childlike patois of the colonies:

"*C'est l'amou, l'amou qui tourne la tête à li.*"

It was enough to drive the unlucky judge mad as well.

But no. The siren had been unfortunate in her choice of a ballad. For, at the mere name of Mam'zelle Zizi, Frantz was suddenly transported to a gloomy chamber in the Marais, a long way from Sidonie's salon, and his compassionate heart evoked the image of little Désirée Delobelle, who had loved him so long. Until she was fifteen, she had never been called anything but Zirée or Zizi, and she was the *pauv' pitit Zizi* of the Creole ballad to the life, the ever-neglected, ever-faithful lover. In vain now did the other sing. Frantz no longer heard her or saw her. He was in that poor room, beside the great arm-chair, on the little low chair on which he had sat so often awaiting the father's return. Yes, there, and there only, was his salvation. He must take refuge in that child's love, throw himself at her feet, say to her: "Take me — save me!" And who knows? She loved him so dearly. Perhaps she would save him, would cure him of his guilty passion.

"Where are you going?" asked Risler, seeing that his brother rose hurriedly as soon as the last flourish was at an end.

"I am going back. It is late."

"What! You are not going to sleep here? Why, your room is ready for you."

"All ready," added Sidonie, with a meaning glance.

He refused resolutely. His presence in Paris was necessary for the fulfilment of certain very important commissions entrusted to him by the Company. They continued their efforts to detain him when he was in the vestibule, when he was crossing the garden in the moonlight and running to the station, amid all the diverse noises of Asnières.

When he had gone, Risler went up to his room, leaving Sidonie and Madame Dobson at the windows of the salon. The music from the neighboring Casino reached their ears, with the "Yo-ho!" of the boatmen and the footsteps of the dancers like a rhythmical, muffled drumming on the tambourine.

"There's a kill-joy for you!" observed Madame Dobson.

"Oh! I have checkmated him," replied Sidonie; "only I must be careful. I shall be closely watched now. He is so jealous. I am going to write to Cazaboni not to come again for some time, and you must tell Georges to-morrow morning to go to Savigny for a fortnight."

III.

POOR LITTLE MAM'ZELLE ZIZI.

OH! how happy Désirée was!

Frantz came every day and sat at her feet on the little low chair, as in the good old days, and he no longer came to talk of Sidonie.

As soon as she began to work in the morning, she would see the door open softly. "Good morning, Mam'zelle Zizi." He always called her now by the name she had borne as a child; and if you could know how prettily he said it: "Good morning, Mam'zelle Zizi."

In the evening they waited for "the father" together, and while she worked he made her shudder with the story of his travels.

"What in the world is the matter with you? You're not the same as you used to be," Mamma Delobelle would say, surprised to see her in such high spirits and above all so active. For instead of remaining always buried in her easy-chair, with the self-renunciation of a young grandmother, the little creature was constantly jumping up and running to the window as lightly as if she were putting out wings; and she practised standing erect, asking her mother in a whisper:

"Do you notice *it*, when I am not walking?"

From her shapely little head, upon which she had previously concentrated all her energies in the arrangement of her hair, her coquetry extended over her whole person, as did her fine curly tresses when she unloosed them. Yes, she was very, very coquettish now; and everybody noticed it. Even the birds and insects for ornament assumed a knowing little air.

Ah! yes, Désirée Delobelle was happy. For some days Monsieur Frantz had been talking of their all going into the country together; and as the father, kind and generous as always, graciously consented to allow the ladies to take a day's furlough, they all four set out one Sunday morning.

It is impossible to imagine what a beautiful day it was. When Désirée opened her window at six o'clock, when she saw the sun, already hot and luminous, shining through the morning haze, when she thought of the trees, the fields, the roads, of all the marvellous splendors of nature, which she had not seen for so long, and which she was soon to see, leaning on Frantz's arm, the tears came to her eyes. The church bells ringing, the noises of Paris already ascending from the streets, the Sunday clothes and cleanliness — the poor man's way of celebrating the day — which lighten the gloom of even the little chimney sweep's cheeks, all the accessories of the dawning of that memorable day were long and blissfully revelled in by her.

The evening before, Frantz had brought her a parasol, a little parasol with an ivory handle; with

the aid of that she had arranged a very careful but very simple toilet, as befits a poor infirm little creature who does not wish to attract attention. And it is stating it too mildly to say that the poor infirm little creature was charming.

At precisely nine o'clock Frantz arrived in a cab hired for the day, and went upstairs for his guests. Down came Mam'zelle Zizi coquettishly, unassisted, supporting herself by the baluster, without faltering. Mamma Delobelle followed behind, keeping an eye upon her; and the illustrious actor, his topcoat on his arm, hurried on before with young Risler, to open the carriage door.

Oh! the lovely drive, the lovely country, the lovely river, the lovely trees!

Do not ask her where they went; Désirée never knew. But she will tell you that the sun was brighter there than anywhere else, the birds more joyous, the woods denser; and she will not lie.

When she was a little child, she had sometimes had such days of fresh air and long drives in the country. But later, constant toil, poverty, and the sedentary life so grateful to the infirm, had kept her nailed, as it were, to the old quarter of Paris in which she lived, and where the high roofs, the windows with iron balconies, the factory chimneys, making with their new bricks red streaks against the black walls of historic mansions, had formed an unchanging and satisfying horizon for her life. For a long time she had known naught of flowers beyond the volubilis at her window, naught of trees beyond the acacias in the Fromont garden

of which she caught distant glimpses through the smoke.

How her heart swelled with joy, therefore, when she found herself in the open country! Light as air with all her pleasure and her revivified youth, she went from surprise to surprise, clapping her hands and uttering little birdlike cries; and the impulsive outbursts of her artless curiosity concealed the hesitation of her gait. Really *it* was not too noticeable. Besides, he was always at hand, ready to support her, to give her his hand across the ditches, and he was so attentive, the expression of his eyes so tender! That wonderful day passed like a vision. The great blue sky appearing like vapor between the branches, the long line of underbrush extending to the foot of the first trees of the forest, — the shadowy, mysterious forest, where the flowers grow straighter and taller, where the golden mosses resemble rays of sunlight on the trunks of the oaks, — the surprise caused by the clearings flooded with light, — everything, even to the weariness following a day's walking in the open air, entranced and fascinated her.

Toward evening, when, as they stood on the verge of the forest, she saw — in the light of the setting sun — the dusty roads winding among the fields, the river like a silver thread, and over yonder, in the space between two hills, a mist of gray roofs, weathercocks and cupolas which they told her was Paris, she carried away at a glance, in a corner of her memory, that whole blooming countryside, perfumed with love and with June

"As they stood on the verge of the forest, she saw the river like a silver thread."

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Goupil & Cie Paris

hawthorn, as if she were never, never to see it again.

The nosegay that the little cripple brought back from that beautiful excursion made her room fragrant for a week. Among the hyacinths, the violets, the white-thorn, there were a multitude of nameless little flowers, those flowers of the lowly which grow from nomadic seed scattered everywhere along the roads.

Gazing at the slender pale blue and bright pink blossoms, with all the delicate shades that flowers invented before colorists, many and many a time during that week Désirée took her excursion again. The violets reminded her of the little moss-covered mound on which she had picked them, seeking them under the leaves, her fingers touching Frantz's. These great water-lilies they had found on the edge of a ditch, still damp from the winter rains, and, in order to reach them, she had leaned very heavily on Frantz's arm. All these memories recurred to her as she worked. Meanwhile, the sun, shining in at the open window, made the feathers of the humming-birds glisten. The springtime, youth, the songs of the birds, the fragrance of the flowers transfigured that dismal fifth floor workroom, and Désirée said in all seriousness to Mamma Delobelle, putting her nose to her friend's bouquet:

"Have you noticed how sweet the flowers smell this year, mamma?"

And Frantz too began to fall under the charm. Little by little, Mam'zelle Zizi took possession of his heart and banished from it even the memory

of Sidonie. To be sure, the poor judge did all that he could to accomplish that result. At every hour in the day he was by Désirée's side, and clung to her like a child. Not once did he venture to return to Asnières. He was too much afraid of the other.

"Pray come and see us once in a while; Sidonie keeps asking for you," Risler said to him from time to time, when his brother came to the factory to see him. But Frantz held firm, alleging all sorts of business engagements as pretexts for postponing his visit to the next day. It was easy to satisfy Risler, who was more engrossed than ever with his press, which they had just begun to build.

Whenever Frantz came down from his brother's closet, old Sigismond was sure to be watching for him, and would walk a few steps with him in his long lutestring sleeves, quill and knife in hand. He kept the young man informed concerning matters at the factory. For some time past, things seemed to have changed for the better. Monsieur Georges came to his office regularly, and returned to Savigny every night. No more bills were presented at the counting-room. It seemed too that Madame over yonder was keeping more within bounds.

The cashier was triumphant.

"You see, my boy, whether I did well to write to you. Your arrival was all that was needed to straighten everything out. And yet," the goodman would add by force of habit, "and yet *I haf no gonfidence.*"

"Never fear, Monsieur Sigismond, I am here," the judge would reply.

"You 're not going away yet, are you, my dear Frantz?"

"No, no — not yet. I have an important matter to finish up first."

"Ah! so much the better."

The important matter to which Frantz referred was his marriage to Désirée Delobelle. He had not yet mentioned it to anyone, not even to her; but Mam'zelle Zizi must have suspected something, for she became prettier and more light-hearted from day to day, as if she foresaw that the day would soon come when she would need all her gayety and all her beauty.

They were alone in the workroom one Sunday afternoon. Mamma Delobelle had gone out, proud enough to show herself for once in public with her great man, and leaving friend Frantz with her daughter to keep her company. Carefully dressed, his whole person endued with a holiday air, Frantz had a singular expression on his face that day, an expression at once timid and resolute, emotional and solemn, and simply from the way in which the little low chair took its place beside the great easy chair, the easy chair understood that a very serious communication was about to be made to it in confidence, and it had some little suspicion as to what it might be.

The conversation began with divers unimportant remarks, interspersed with long and frequent pauses, just as, on a journey, we stop at every

baiting-place to take breath, to enable us to reach our destination.

"It is a fine day to-day."

"Oh! yes, beautiful."

"Our flowers still smell sweet."

"Oh! very sweet."

And even as they uttered those trivial sentences, their voices trembled at the thought of what was going to be said in another moment.

At last the little low chair moved a little nearer the great easy chair; their eyes met, their fingers were intertwined, and the two children, in low tones, slowly, called each other by their names.

"Désirée!"

"Frantz!"

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

It was the soft little tap of a daintily gloved hand which fears to soil itself by the slightest touch.

"Come in!" said Désirée, with a slight gesture of impatience; and Sidonie appeared, lovely, coquettish and affable. She had come to see her little Zizi, to embrace her as she was passing by. She had been meaning to come for so long.

Frantz's presence seemed to surprise her greatly, and, being engrossed by her delight in talking with her former friend, she hardly looked at him. After the effusive greetings and caresses, after a pleasant chat over old times, she expressed a wish to see the window on the landing and the room formerly occupied by the Rislers. It pleased her thus to live all her youth over again.

"Do you remember, Frantz, when Princess

Humming-bird entered your room, holding her little head very straight under a diadem of birds' feathers?"

Frantz did not reply. He was too deeply moved to reply. Something warned him that it was on his account, solely on his account, that the woman had come, that she was determined to see him again, to prevent him from giving himself to another, and the poor wretch realized with dismay that she would not have to exert herself overmuch to accomplish her object. When he saw her enter the room his whole heart had been caught in the toils once more.

Désirée suspected nothing, not she. Sidonie's manner was so frank and friendly. And then, they were brother and sister now. Love was no longer possible between them.

But the little cripple had a vague presentiment of her woe when Sidonie, standing in the doorway and ready to go, turned carelessly to her brother-in-law and said:

"By the way, Frantz, Risler told me to be sure and bring you back to dine with us to-night. The carriage is below. We will pick him up as we pass the factory."

Then she added, with the prettiest smile imaginable:

"You will let us have him, won't you, Zirée? Don't be afraid; we will send him back."

And he had the courage to go, the ungrateful wretch!

He went without hesitation, without once turn-

ing back, whirled away by his passion as by a raging sea, and neither on that day nor the next, nor ever after, could Mam'zelle Zizi's great easy chair learn what the interesting communication was that the little low chair had to make to it.

IV.

THE WAITING ROOM.

"WELL, yes, I love you, I love you, more than ever and forever! What is the use of struggling and fighting against fate? Our crime is stronger than we are. And after all, is it a crime for us to love? We were destined for each other. Have we not the right to come together although life has parted us? So, come. It is all over, we will go away. To-morrow evening, Lyon station, at ten o'clock. The tickets are secured and I shall expect you. "FRANTZ."

For a month past Sidonie had been hoping for that letter, a month during which she had brought all her wheedling and cunning into play to lure her brother-in-law on to that written explosion of passion. She had had difficulty in accomplishing it. It was no easy matter to pervert an honest young heart like Frantz's to the point of committing a crime; and in that strange contest, in which the one who really loved fought against his own cause, she had often felt that she was at the end of her strength and was almost discouraged. When she was most confident that he was subjugated, his sense of right would suddenly rebel,

and he would be all ready to fly, to escape her once more.

What a triumph it was for her, therefore, when that letter was handed to her one morning. Madame Dobson happened to be there. She had just arrived, laden with complaints from Georges, who was horribly bored away from his mistress, and was beginning to be alarmed concerning this brother-in-law, who was more attentive, more jealous, more exacting than a husband.

"Oh! the poor dear fellow, the poor dear fellow," said the sentimental American, "if you could see how unhappy he is!"

And, shaking her curls, she unrolled her music-roll and took from it the poor dear fellow's letters, which she had carefully hidden between the leaves of her arias, delighted to be involved in this love-story, to give rein to her emotion in an atmosphere of intrigue and mystery which melted her cold eyes and softened her dry, white complexion.

Strange to say, while lending her aid most willingly to this constant going and coming of love-letters, the youthful and attractive Dobson had never written or received a single one on her own account.

Always on the road between Asnières and Paris with an amorous message under her wing, that curious carrier-pigeon remained true to her dove-cot and cooed for none but unselfish motives.

When Sidonie showed her Frantz's note, Madame Dobson asked:

"What reply are you going to make?"

"It is already done. I answered yes."

"What! You will go away with that madman?"

Sidonie began to laugh.

"Ha! ha! well, hardly. I said yes, so that he may go and wait for me at the station. That's all. The least I can do is to give him a quarter of an hour of agony. He has made me miserable enough for the last month. Just consider that I have changed my whole life for my gentleman! I have had to close my doors and give up seeing my friends and everybody I know who is young and agreeable, beginning with Georges and ending with you. For you know, my dear, you were n't agreeable to him, and he would have liked to dismiss you like the rest."

The one thing that Sidonie did not mention — and it was the most potent cause of her anger against Frantz — was that he had frightened her, that he had frightened her terribly by threatening her with her husband. From that moment she had felt decidedly ill at ease, and her life, her dear life, which she so petted and coddled, had seemed to her to be exposed to serious danger. Such men as Risler, too fair and cold in appearance, are subject to terrible outbursts of wrath, white-hot wrath, of which no one can foresee the results, like those colorless and odorless explosives which we fear to use because no one knows their power. Yes, the thought that her husband might some day be apprized of her conduct positively terrified her.

There came to her mind, from her former

existence, a wretched existence in a crowded quarter, memories of households broken up, husbands avenged, blood spattered upon the shame of adultery. Visions of death haunted her. And death, everlasting rest, profound silence, were well calculated to frighten that little creature, hungry for pleasure, eager for noise and commotion to the point of madness.

That blessed letter put an end to all her fears. It was impossible now for Frantz to denounce her, even in the frenzy of his disappointment, knowing that she had such a weapon in her hands; and if he did speak, she would show the letter, and all his accusations would become in Risler's eyes calumny pure and simple. Ah! master judge, we have you now.

Suddenly she was seized with an outbreak of wild joy.

"I am born again — I am born again!" she cried to Madame Dobson. She ran out into the garden, gathered great bouquets for her salon, threw the windows wide open to the sunlight, gave orders to the cook, the coachman, the gardener. The house must be made to look beautiful, for Georges was coming back, and for a beginning she organized a grand dinner-party for the end of the week. Verily you would have said that she had been absent a month, that she had just returned from an annoying, wearisome journey on business, she showed such haste in re-establishing life and activity about her.

The next evening Sidonie, Risler and Madame

Dobson were together in the salon. While honest Risler turned the leaves of an old hand-book of mechanics, Sidonie sang to Madame Dobson's accompaniment. Suddenly Sidonie stopped in the middle of her aria and burst into a roar of laughter. The clock had just struck ten.

Risler looked up quickly.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing — an idea that came into my head," replied Sidonie, winking at Madame Dobson and pointing at the clock.

It was the hour appointed for the meeting, and she was thinking of her lover's torture as he waited for her to come.

Since the return of the messenger bringing from Sidonie the "yes" he had so feverishly awaited, a great calmness had overspread his troubled mind, like the sudden removal of a heavy burden. No more uncertainty, no more clashing between passion and duty. He had an instantaneous feeling of relief, as if he no longer had a conscience. He made his preparations with the greatest tranquillity, pulled his trunks on to the floor, emptied the bureau and closets, and long before the time at which his luggage was to be called for, he was sitting on a trunk in the middle of his room, gazing at the map nailed to the wall in front of him, like an emblem of his wandering life, following with his eye the straight course of the roads and the wavy lines that represent the seas.

Not once did it occur to him that on the other

side of the landing someone was weeping and sighing because of him. Not once did he think of his brother's despair, of the ghastly drama they were to leave behind them. His mind was far away from all these matters, it had gone on before, and was already on the platform of the station with Sidonie, in dark clothes suitable for travel and for flight: by, even farther away, on the shore of the blue sea, where they would stay some little time to evade pursuit; still farther away, arriving with her in a strange land, where no one could demand her or take her from him. At other times, he thought of the railway carriage rushing at night through the lonely country. He saw a sweet little pale face resting beside his on the cushions, a blooming lip within reach of his lip, and two fathomless eyes looking at him by the soft light of the lamp, to the soothing accompaniment of the wheels and the steam.

And now, engine, hiss and roar. Shake the earth, redden the sky, spit smoke and flame. Plunge into tunnels, cross mountains and rivers, leap, belch, shriek; but take us with you, take us far from the civilized world, its laws, its affections, away from life, away from ourselves.

Two hours before the opening of the gate for the designated train, Frantz was already at the Lyon station, that gloomy station which, in the distant quarter of Paris in which it lies, seems like a first halting-place in the provinces. He sat down in the darkest corner and remained there

without stirring, as if dazed. At that moment his brain was as excited and uproarious as the station itself. He was overwhelmed by a flood of confused reflections, vague memories, fanciful comparisons. In a single minute he made such journeys to the farthest corner of his memory that he asked himself two or three times why he was there, and what he was waiting for. But the thought of Sidonie gushed forth from those inconsequent thoughts and illumined them with a bright light.

She was coming.

Instinctively, although the appointed hour was still distant, he looked among the people who were hurrying along, calling to one another, to see if he could not discern that graceful figure suddenly emerging from the crowd and thrusting it aside at every step with the radiance of her beauty.

After many departures and arrivals and shrill whistles which, confined beneath the arched roof, resembled a sound of tearing, the station suddenly became empty, as deserted as a church on weekdays. The time for the ten o'clock train was drawing near. There was no other train before that. Frantz rose.

Now it was no longer a dream, a chimera lost in that vast uncertain expanse of time. In a quarter of an hour, half an hour at the latest, she would be there.

Thereupon began for him the horrible torture of suspense, that strange plight of body and mind when all the faculties are in abeyance, when the heart no longer beats, when the breath is hurried and panting like the thought, when gestures and

sentences are left unfinished, when everything is waiting. Poets have described again and again the horrible agony of the lover listening to the rumbling of a carriage through the deserted street, a furtive step ascending the stairs.

But to await one's mistress in a railway station, in a waiting-room, is a far more dismal matter. The dim lanterns, making no reflection on the dusty floor, the great windows and glass doors, the incessant noise of footsteps and slamming doors which torments the anxious ear, the bare, lofty walls, the placards advertising "an excursion train to Monaco," "a circular tour in Switzerland," the atmosphere of travel, of change, of indifference, of instability, all are well adapted to oppress the heart and heighten its anguish.

Frantz went hither and thither, watching the carriages that arrived. They stopped at the long flight of stone steps. The carriage doors opened and closed noisily, and from the darkness without, faces appeared at the door in the light, faces tranquil or disturbed, happy or distressed, hats trimmed with feathers and enveloped in light veils, peasants' caps, sleeping children dragged along by the hand. Each new arrival made him start. He fancied that he saw her enter, closely veiled, hesitating, a little embarrassed. How quickly he would be by her side, to comfort her, to protect her!

As the station filled, his watch became more difficult. Carriages succeeded one another without intermission. He was obliged to run from one

door to another. Then he went out, thinking that he could see better outside, and unable to endure longer, in the stifling air of the crowded waiting-room, the anxiety that was beginning to oppress him.

It was a damp evening toward the end of September. There was a light mist, and the lanterns of the carriages at the foot of the broad inclined footway, appeared faint and indistinct. Each one, on arriving, seemed to say: "It is I, — here I am." But it was never Sidonie who alighted, and the carriage he had watched as it drew near, his heart swelling with hope as if it contained more than his life, he watched as it returned to Paris, disgustingly light and empty.

The hour for the departure of the train was approaching. He looked at the clock. There was but a quarter of an hour more. It frightened him; but the bell at the wicket, which had now been opened, summoned him. He ran thither and took his place in the long line.

"Two first-class for Marseille," he said. It seemed to him as if that were equivalent to taking possession.

He made his way back to his post of observation, through the luggage-laden trucks and the late-comers who jostled him as they ran. The drivers shouted: "Look out!" He stood there among the wheels of the cabs, under the horses' feet, with deaf ears and staring eyes. Only five minutes more. It was almost impossible for her to arrive in time. People were rushing into the

train-shed. Trunks rolled by on baggage trucks; and the great bundles wrapped in cloth, the valises studded with copper nails, the little bags slung over the shoulders of commercial travellers, the baskets of all shapes and sizes, were engulfed by the same doorway, jostled and swaying with the same haste.

At last she appeared.

Yes, there she is, it is certainly she — a woman in black, slender and graceful, accompanied by another shorter woman, Madame Dobson, no doubt.

But a second glance undeceived him. It was a young woman who resembled her, a woman of fashion like her, with a happy face. A man, also young, joined them. It was evidently a wedding-party; the mother accompanied them, to see them safely on board the train. They passed Frantz, enveloped in the current of happiness that bore them along. With a feeling of envy and rage he saw them pass through the swinging doors, clinging to each other, united and pressed close together in the crowd.

It seemed to him that those people had robbed him, that it was his place, his and Sidonie's, that they were to occupy in the train.

Now there is the confusion of departure, the last stroke of the bell, the steam escaping with a hissing sound, mingled with the hurried footsteps of belated passengers, the slamming of doors and the rumbling of the heavy omnibuses. And Sidonie comes not. And Frantz still waits.

At that moment a hand is placed on his shoulder.

Great God!

He turns. Monsieur Gardinois's coarse face, surrounded by a travelling cap with ear-pieces, is before him.

"I am not mistaken, it is Monsieur Risler. Are you going to Marseille by the express? I am not going far."

He explains to Frantz that he has missed the Orléans train, and is going to try to connect with Savigny by the Lyon line; then he talks about Risler Aîné and the factory.

"It seems that business has n't been prospering for some time. They were caught in the Bonnardel failure. Ah! our young men need to be careful. At the rate they 're sailing their ship, the same thing is likely to happen to them that happened to Bonnardel. But excuse me, I believe they 're going to close the gate. *Au revoir.*"

Frantz has hardly heard what he has been saying. His brother's ruin, the destruction of the whole world, nothing is of any further consequence to him. He is waiting, waiting.

But now the gate is abruptly closed like a last barrier between him and his persistent hope. Once more the station is empty. The uproar has been transferred to the line of the railway, and suddenly a shrill whistle falls upon the lover's ear like an ironical farewell, then dies away in the darkness.

The ten o'clock train has gone.

He tries to be calm and to reason. Evidently

she missed the train from Asnières; but, knowing that he is waiting for her, she will come, no matter how late it may be. He will wait on. The waiting-room was made for that.

The unhappy man sits down on a bench. The great windows have been closed, and the darkness beyond them is broken by gleams of glazed paper. The book-stall keeper, half asleep, is engaged in setting his stock in order. Frantz glances mechanically at the rows of gaudy volumes, the typical railway library, whose titles he has learned by heart in the four hours he has been there.

There are books that he recognizes from having read them in his tent at Ismailia or in the steamer that brought him back from Suez, and all those commonplace, trivial novels have retained a marine or exotic odor for him. But soon the book-stall is closed, and he no longer has even that resource to deceive his weariness and his fever. The toy-stall, too, has withdrawn behind its board shutters. Whistles, wheelbarrows, watering-pots, spades, rakes, all the playthings of little Parisians in the country, disappear in a twinkling. The proprietress, a sickly, sad-faced woman, wraps herself in an old cloak and goes away, her foot-warmer in her hand.

All these people have finished their day's work, have prolonged it to the last minute with the courage and obstinacy characteristic of Paris, which does not extinguish its lamps until daylight.

The prospect of a long vigil brings to his mind a well known room in which at that hour the lamp

burns low on a table laden with humming-birds and glow-worms; but that vision passes swiftly through his mind in the chaos of confused thoughts to which the delirium of suspense gives birth.

Suddenly he discovers that he is dying with thirst. The restaurant is still open. He enters. The night waiters are dozing on the benches. The floor is damp with the dregs from the glasses. It takes them an interminable time to wait upon him; and then, just as he is about to drink, the thought that Sidonie may have arrived during his absence, that perhaps she is looking for him in the waiting-room, makes him jump to his feet and rush out like a madman, leaving his glass full and his money on the table.

She will not come.

He feels it.

His footsteps, ringing along the walk in front of the station, monotonous and regular, grate upon his ears, as if they were testifying to his solitude and disappointment.

What has happened? What can have detained her? Is she ill, or was it the anticipation of remorse for her sin? But in that case she would have sent him word, she would have sent Madame Dobson. Perhaps Risler had found the letter? She was so reckless, so imprudent.

And while he thus lost himself in conjectures, the hours passed. The roofs of the buildings of Mazas, buried in darkness, were already beginning to stand out distinctly against the brightening sky. What was he to do? He must go to

Asnières at once and try to find out what had happened. He wished he were there already.

Having made up his mind, he descended the steps of the station at a rapid pace, passing soldiers with their knapsacks on their backs, and poor people coming to take the morning train, the train of the poverty and want which rise betimes.

He crossed Paris at daybreak, a dismal, shivering Paris, where the lanterns on the police stations showed their red lights at intervals, and the policemen walked their beats two by two, stopping at the street corners and scrutinizing the shadows.

In front of one of the stations he saw a crowd collected, ragpickers and countrywomen. Doubtless some drama of the night about to reach its *dénoûment* before the commissioner of police. — Ah! if Frantz had known what that drama was! but he could have no suspicion, and he glanced at the crowd indifferently from a distance.

But all such unpleasant sights, the very dawn rising over Paris with the pallor of weariness, the lanterns blinking on the bank of the Seine, like the wax tapers around a corpse, the exhaustion of his sleepless night, enveloped him in profound melancholy.

When he reached Asnières, after a walk of two or three hours, it was like an awakening.

The sun, rising in all its glory, set field and river on fire. The bridge, the houses, the quay, all stood forth with that matutinal sharpness of outline which gives the impression of a new day emerging, luminous and smiling, from the dense

mists of the night. From a distance he descried his brother's house, already awake, the open blinds and the flowers on the window-sills. He wandered about some time before he could summon courage to enter.

Suddenly some one hailed him from the shore:

"Ah! Monsieur Frantz. — How early you are to-day!"

It was Sidonie's coachman taking his horses to bathe in the river.

"There 's nothing new at the house?" inquired Frantz tremblingly.

"Nothing new, Monsieur Frantz."

"Is my brother at home?"

"No, Monsieur slept at the factory."

"No one sick?"

"No, Monsieur Frantz, no one, so far as I know."

The horses waded into the water up to their breasts, tossing the spray about.

Thereupon Frantz made up his mind to ring at the small gate.

The gardener was raking the paths. The house was astir; and, early as it was, he heard Sidonie's voice as clear and vibrating as the song of a bird among the rosebushes of the façade.

She was talking with animation.

Frantz, deeply moved, drew near to listen.

"No, no cream. The *café parfait* will be enough. Be sure that it 's well frozen and ready at seven o'clock. — Oh! about an *entrée* — let us see — "

She was holding council with her cook concern-

ing the famous dinner-party for the next day. He brother-in-law's sudden appearance did not di concert her.

"Ah! good-morning, Frantz," she said ver calmly, "I am at your service directly. We 'r to have some people to dinner to-morrow, cu tomers of the firm, a grand business dinner. You excuse me, won't you?"

Fresh and smiling, in the white ruffles of h trailing *peignoir* and her little lace cap, she co tinued to discuss her menu, inhaling the cool a that rose from the fields and the river. There w not the slightest trace of chagrin or anxiety upc that tranquil face. Her smooth forehead, th charming *naïve* expression of surprise, which w likely to keep her young so long, her pink lip slightly parted, were in striking contrast with th lover's features, distorted by a night of agony an fatigue.

For a long quarter of an hour Frantz, sitting i a corner of the salon, saw all the convention dishes of a bourgeois dinner-party pass before hi in their regular order, from the little hot *pâte* the *sole Normande* and the innumerable ingredien of which that dish is composed, to the Montreu peaches and Fontainebleau grapes. She did n spare him a single *entremet.*

At last, when they were alone and he was ab to speak, he asked in a hollow voice:

"Did n't you receive my letter?"

"Why, yes, of course."

She had risen to go to the mirror and adjust

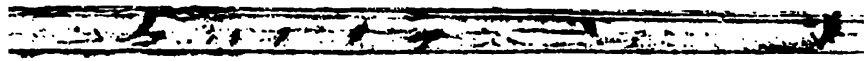
little curl or two entangled with her floating ribbons, and continued, looking at herself all the while:

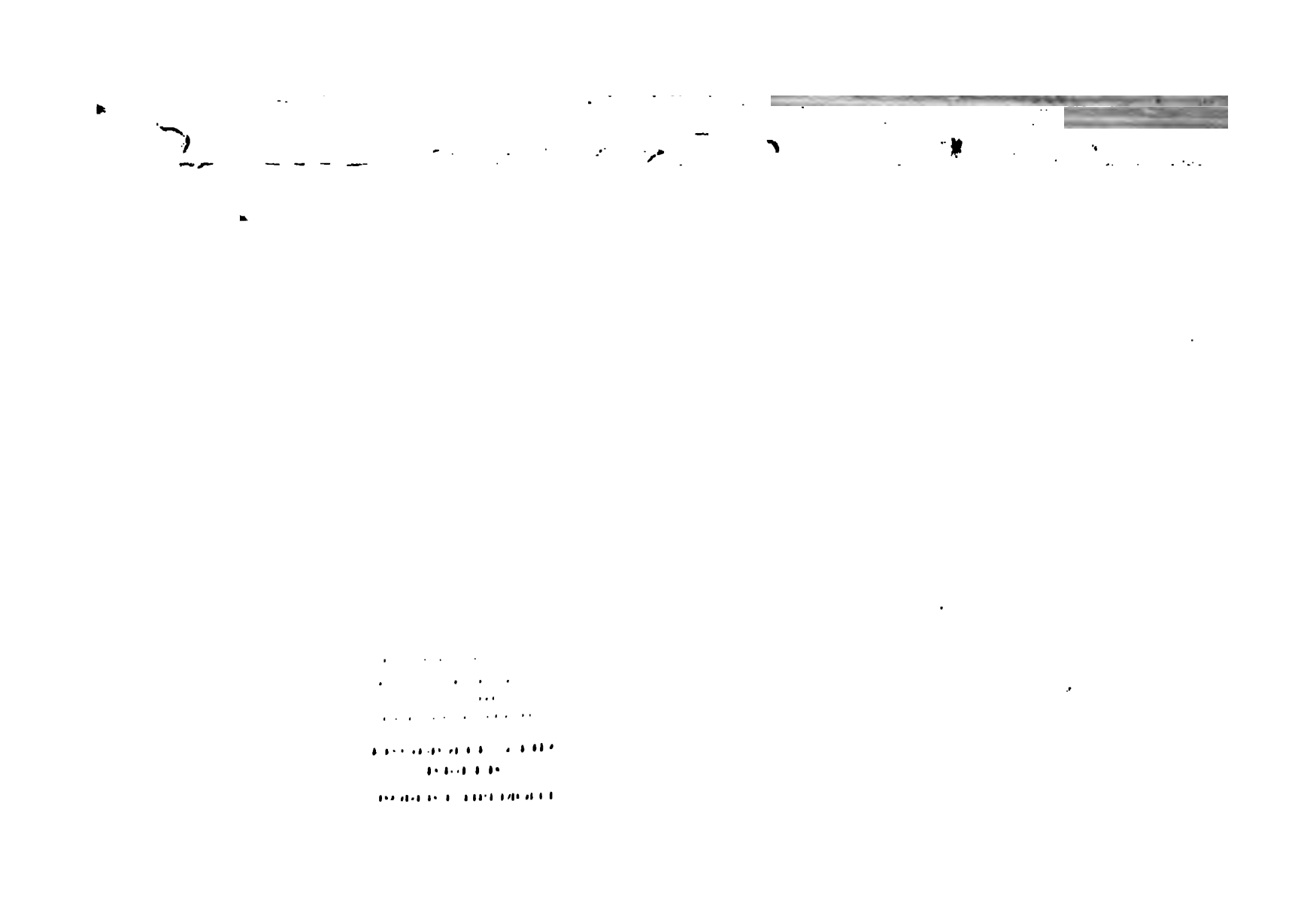
"Why, yes, I received your letter. Indeed, I was enchanted to receive it. — Now, if you should ever feel inclined to tell your brother any of the vile stories about me that you have threatened me with, I could easily satisfy him that the only source of your lying tale-bearing was anger with me for repulsing a criminal passion as it deserved. Consider yourself warned, my dear boy — and *au revoir*."

As pleased as an actress who has just completed a bit of declamation with fine effect, she passed him and left the salon smiling, with a little curl at the corners of her mouth, triumphant and without anger.

And he did not kill her!

END OF VOL. I.





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